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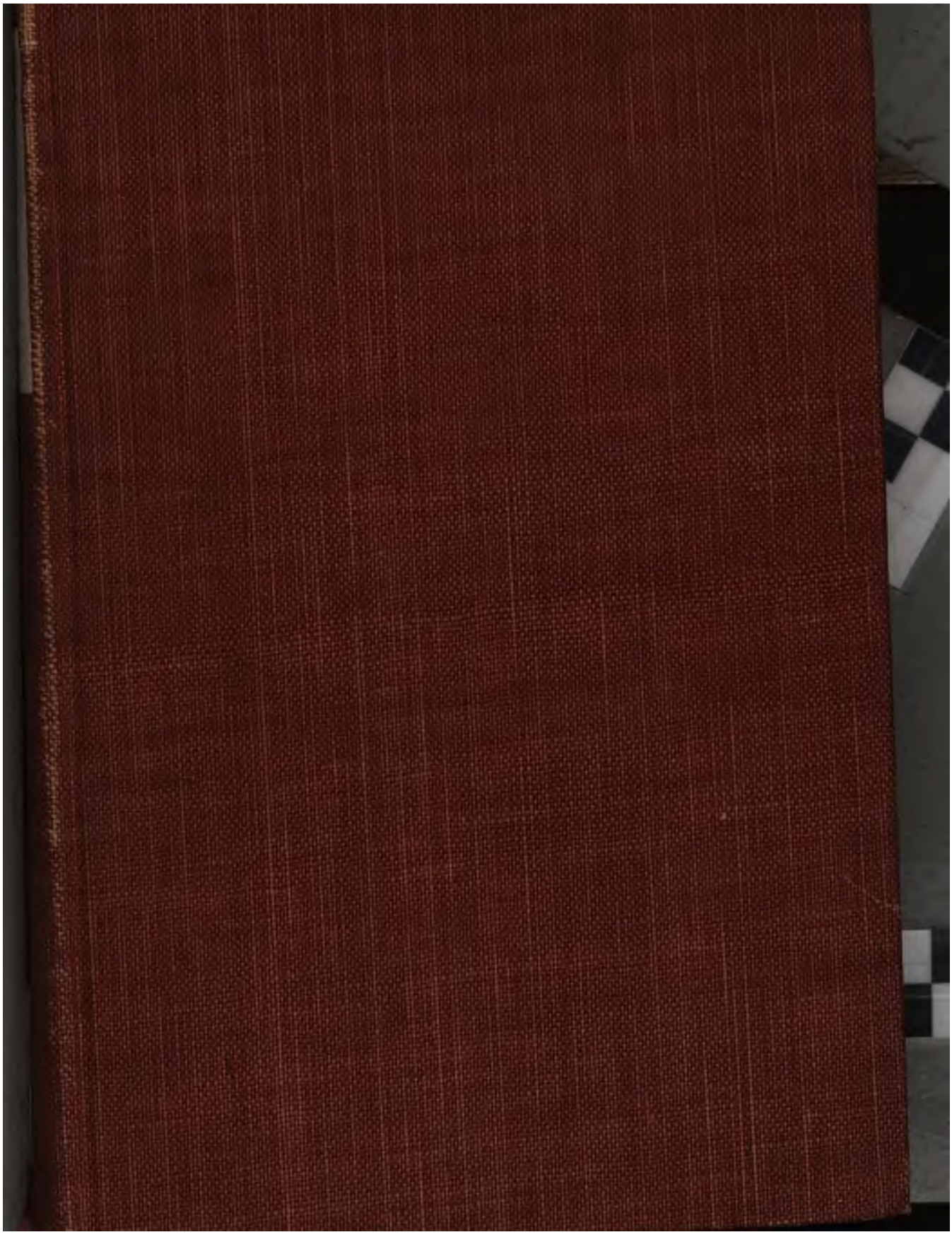

ARTHUR.

Volume II.

ARTHUR.

Volume II.

A.DE MARCEL

"He landed me on the shore in a dying condition."
Original etching by Adrian Marcel.

Arthur and Indolence—One of the Seven Cardinal Sins

ILLUSTRATED WITH ETCHINGS BY ADRIAN MARCEL.

BY EUGENE SUE

IN TWO VOLUMES
VOLUME II.

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LORD FALMOUTH — CONTINUED

ARTHUR.

CHAPTER I.

THE LETTER.

Lord Falmouth to Arthur.

"ON BOARD THE YACHT *Gazelle.*
13 June, 18—.

"I MIGHT have told you all that I now mean to write, dear friend, but that I desire you to keep this letter.

"If the projects that I now propose are ever realised, we will read this with pleasure some future day and remember that it was the starting-point of the glorious career that I have imagined for both of us.

"If, on the contrary, fate should separate us, these pages will remain as the true story of the circumstances that inspired the sincere attachment I have for you.

"The first time I met you was at a breakfast given by M. de Cernay. Your agreeable conversation pleased me at first; then, from a peculiar habit of thought I noticed in you, I saw that, with all your charm and cordiality, you would remain for ever separated from your fellow men by an unsurmountable barrier.

"From that moment I began to take a lively interest in you.

"I knew from experience that eccentric characters

such as yours suffer cruelly from the isolation to which they condemn themselves; for these proud, sensitive, and easily offended natures can not readily assimilate themselves with the rest of mankind, — they are constantly being wounded or taking offence, and they instinctively create for themselves a solitude in the midst of society.

"I left for England under the domination of such thoughts as these.

"In London I met several of your friends, who spoke in such a way as to confirm the opinion I had formed of you.

"I found you some months after in the house of Madame de Pënâfiel, in whom you seemed much interested.

"As at that time I shared the ill-feeling that was manifested in society towards her, and you had not yet told me of her real worth, I was astonished to see you, of all men, seeking happiness in a liaison with a woman who was recognised as a flirt, for I thought that your great susceptibility must of necessity be continually wounded in such a relation with Madame de Pënâfiel.

"Men like you, my friend, are endowed with such extraordinary tact, finesse, and clear-sightedness, that they are very seldom mistaken in the women on whom they choose to bestow their affections. Is not this true? Were not Hélène and Marguerite both worthy of your love? Therefore, let me advise you in this much, always trust blindly in your first impressions.

"I tell you this because I feel how much I love you, and it must be that you instinctively love me, too.

"Pardon me this digression; let us return to the marquise.

"As long as I saw that you were happy I was only interested in you because so much evil was said about you.

"But very soon this war that was being waged against you became so general and violent, the calumnies were

so fierce, that I began to believe Madame de Pënâfiel was worthy of your love and that you deserved hers. Later, you told me everything and I recognised my first error; then came your cruel rupture.

"You have been cruelly punished for your doubts! May Heaven forgive you!

"When you asked me to assist you in helping the husband of your cousin Hélène, the delicacy of your conduct towards him was so touching that you took a higher place in my estimation, a profound admiration; yes, my friend, I admired your disinterestedness more than your manner of acting, because I had discovered that through a fatal quality in your nature you would always find some means of belittling in your own eyes all the merit of this generous act, and that you would not even have the satisfaction of your own conscience.

"For a long time I have been contemplating a voyage to Greece; I saw that you were unhappy and I believed the moment favourable to propose that you should join me in this journey. I shrouded it in mystery in order to excite your curiosity, and when you finally decided to accompany me I was very happy.

"Why was I so happy, my friend? Because, without at all resembling you, bad luck, or my own exigencies, had until now deprived me of tasting the joys of friendship, and I felt myself drawn towards you by a great similarity of character and mind; because I believed that this voyage would be a useful distraction for you; and because I found in it a precious means of binding you to me in fast and enduring bonds of affection.

"I knew that I should have great difficulty in overcoming your distrust, that I would have deep-rooted doubts to conquer, but that did not discourage me, for I had great faith in the persistence of my attachment and the sagacity of your heart; it had chosen Hélène and Marguerite for you to love, why should not I be chosen as your bosom friend?

"However, when I saw what slow progress I was making in your affections, I was afraid that you did not see through the coldness and indifference that I habitually affected.

"Little by little, though, you began to trust me, and a few days after our departure from France we were like brothers.

"The rapid growth of our friendship did not surprise me; there was between us such an affinity, our souls were so magnetised by sympathy, that at the first contact they were joined for ever.

"Once sure of your affection, I began to examine my treasure at my leisure.

"I was like those antiquaries who, when they finally come into possession of a long-coveted rarity, spend hours in examining and admiring its beauty. It was thus that I learned to appreciate your learning and good sense. It was then that I undertook to awaken the good instincts that I believed existed in your nature.

"I was not mistaken. When I had once made this discovery, you were no longer in my eyes a poor, nervous, and irritable child, that we love because it is weak and suffering, but a proud and venturesome young man, with a strong mind, great intelligence, and persuasiveness, who had all defects that were the natural opposites of his virtues.

"The Sardinian mystic attacked us. I had a fearful presentiment, and wished to avoid the combat. That was impossible, and I now thank the fates, for you are almost well again, and I owe my life to you.

"Yes, Arthur, I owe you the life of my body in that I exist; I owe you the life of my soul, because you have become my friend.

"Do you know that unless I felt the strength of my gratitude I should be alarmed.

"For a long time I have been seeking a way to

increase your happiness, you have done so much for mine.

"My task has been difficult, for you are possessed of every advantage, — youth, intelligence, name, fortune, and a generous and noble disposition. But I had perceived a fatal tendency which would annihilate all these rare gifts.

"There was the source of all your misfortunes. That was the stream I must ascend to its source, and turn in another direction. If I can only deliver him from this spirit of doubt, I said to myself, would he not then be indebted to me for the enjoyment of all those advantages which doubt now renders useless?

"You have often told me that your fits of defiance and misanthropy were the sole real misfortunes of your life; but do you know what causes these spells of moroseness? The moral inaction in which you live.

"You have a lively, ardent imagination, and, as you give it no aliment, it feeds on you as its victim.

"From this continual reaction of your mind on your heart, from this insatiable need of occupying your thoughts, is born the fatal habit of self-examination, that entices you to such horrid study of your own conduct, and the spirit of analysis that leads you to the discovery of such unworthy motives in others.

"Believe me, my friend, for during many nights I have reflected deeply on your character, and I think I say the truth; believe me, from the moment you give some noble and glorious object to this devouring activity that possesses you, it will be with delight, with ineffable confidence that you will indulge yourself in the tenderest of sentiments. You will then believe blindly, for you will have no time to spend in doubt.

"Before knowing your real value, this voyage to Greece seemed a sufficient occupation for you; but now that I understand you better, I feel that this journey is no more in proportion with the powers of conception

I recognise in you. Now that I can count on you as on myself, new horizons are open to my view. It is not in sterile enterprises that I would employ our courage and our intelligence. I have a higher mark, perhaps you will call it a chimera; but reflect awhile, and you will recognise that there are many chances of its proving successful.

"The problem I set myself to solve was this: To render you happy without harm to myself, that is to say, without having to give you up; to give occupation to your fine mind, so that it should not stand between our friendship, and to put to some useful employment those precious gifts which, left idle, change their nature and become hurtful like some generous substances that fermentation changes into poisons. When I spoke to you about England, of her future, of the part I took in the struggle that was to decide the fate of nations, I noticed that you were attentive, curious, moved; noble and eloquent words escaped your lips; you suggested new ideas, which had all the simple boldness of inspiration. I studied your actions, your features, your accent, and all convinced me that if you wished, my friend, you could have a powerful influence on men. Your learning is great, you have studied well, you have an ardent and proud nature, an independent position, and a worthy name. Listen to my project.

"We will go first to Malta, and there we will wait until your recovery, and take the rest that you need. We will give up the fire-ship of Canaris, and will return to England.

"When you were travelling in my country, you were not interested in any serious study; this time, under my guidance, you will study the workings of the English government, her interests, her economics, etc. Then we will go and continue the same studies in Germany, in Russia, and the United States, in order to finish your political education.

"If I had not confidence in your precociousness, my friend, I might tell you not to be alarmed at this serious programme. As we are both young, rich, gay, intelligent, healthy, and bold, we will go, like two brothers who can rely on each other, advancing steadily to our goal, enjoying, in turn, study and pleasure.

"Our social position, and the studies we propose to take up, will oblige us to come in contact with persons of every degree in the social scale, and will force us to meet in each country that we visit all that is best in rank, intellect, and fortune. Can you imagine what is to be the far-off horizon of this brilliant existence, of this ambitious use of all your faculties, the lowest as well as the highest? Do you know what is to be your recompense for such persistent occupation, which is to be mingled with worldly pleasures, and constantly shared by the most affectionate of friends? Do you know? Perhaps the destinies of a great people may be entrusted to your care; you may become a cabinet minister, a premier.

"As to the means we are to employ to attain this end, which may appear to you unattainable, we will talk about it, and you will find that with your name, your fortune, your long political studies, the experience of men and things that we will have gained in our travels, will open every door to you, whether you wish to present yourself in the Chamber of Deputies, or wish to enter a diplomatic career by accepting some important post.

"In any case, my friend, your decision shall be mine. If you remain at Paris as a member of the government, I will accept, at the court of France, a mission that I have heretofore refused; if you desire to be attached to some foreign court, I can confidently rely upon having sufficient influence to be sent to join you there.

"I know that our position is such that neither you nor I have need of these places in order to meet again,

and continue the intimacy that we have enjoyed; but, as I have already told you, we must fight with all our strength against your mortal enemy, which is idleness, and fight in a manner worthy of your intellect. Now, my friend, can we have a nobler ambition than the interests of our own two countries, to see our friendship serve as a bond of union for their interests, and make them but as one, as it has served to unite our hearts.

"And say not that this is a dream, a chimera. Men of but mediocre ability have reached the end I propose to you. Even though the success of the journey is uncertain, is not the route a delightful one? How full of future enjoyment will your attempts have been, even admitting that they have failed in their object.

"Come, come, Arthur, take courage; make a noble use of the gifts that have been so liberally bestowed on you; and, above all, my friend, fly from that deadly inaction, which has such a fatal influence on your peace of mind and your heart.

"Oh, yes! Escape from it; for now I assure you your friendship is so dear to me, your happiness so precious, that there is nothing in the world I would not attempt to see them both secured to you, and sheltered by a noble ambition.

"These are my projects, — these are my hopes. What do you think of them, my friend? I have written all this to you because I fear that, should I speak thus, a jest, a doubt on your part, would dull my eloquence, and, as my first aim is to convince you, I have taken this means of being the only speaker.

"By way of being peculiar until the very end, I beg that you will send me a written answer.

"According to your acceptance or refusal of this offer of my sincere friendship, your letter will mark one of the happiest or most unfortunate days of my life.

"H. F."

CHAPTER II.

DISTRUST.

BEFORE receiving this letter I was perfectly happy; I was filled with confidence and a sense of security in Falmouth's affection for me; I had perfect faith in my love for him; why should these simple and touching pages have turned such a brilliant day into the gloomiest night?

I read over the letter twice.

What struck me at first was the sublime and inexplicable devotion of Lord Falmouth, who, to save me from the idleness he considered fatal to my happiness, invited me to share his voyages, his studies, and even the career that he hoped I would be successful in.

What astonished me very much (indeed, it almost offended me), was the derisive exaggeration in which he spoke of my merits, which, according to him, were quite sufficient to make a cabinet minister of me, or an ambassador, at least.

Unfortunately, I was not born to comprehend such magnificent exaltation of friendship; for Falmouth's offer was so exorbitant, so out of proportion and above any proof I had been able to give him of my affection, that several times I said: "Can it really be to me that he makes such an offer? What have I ever done to deserve it?"

If what I had done for him was quite unworthy such devotion, what motive could he have in making me such an offer, — so much for so little?

It was not without a hard struggle that I gave myself

up to such questions, for I could foresee a terrible access of suspicion.

Several times I attempted to turn my thoughts away from the fatal declivity towards which they were dragging me, but I felt myself approaching nearer and nearer the fatal abyss of doubt.

Overcome with alarm, I was on the point of going to Henry, and begging him to save me from myself. I would ask him to explain all that was beyond my comprehension in his admirable devotion, to lift me to his own level, for I was so unused to this radiant and all-powerful friendship, which I could not gaze on without becoming dizzy. But a false and miserable shame held me back. I thought it weak and cowardly, and a humiliating proof of inferiority, when it would have been a touching proof of my confidence and reliance.

In spite of myself, I had the horrible feeling that my affection for Falmouth would share the same fate of all my former affections. This friendship had attained its greatest development, it was about to fill my life with delight, enlarge my future. It was fated that I should destroy it.

I was possessed by a strange sensation, — it was as if my spirit were falling rapidly from an ideal sphere, peopled by the most enchanting beings, towards a dark and boundless desert.

A physical comparison will explain this moral impression. The wings that had so long sustained me in the region of divine faith suddenly failed me, and I fell on the arid and desolate soil of analysis in the midst of the ruins of my first hopes. The faith I had until now preserved of the purity and holiness of friendship was to augment these melancholy ruins.

The more I pondered on Falmouth's admirable proposition, the more I admired its careful, almost paternal solicitude, the less worthy of it I found myself.

I could neither understand nor believe that the service I had rendered him in saving him from threatened danger was worth so much self-sacrifice on his part. This train of thought very soon led me to denying that there was anything really deserving in my conduct towards Henry.

Strange monomania! Contrary to those men who commit base acts, and then employ every means of proving that their conduct was honourable, I succeeded, by dint of sophisms, in vilifying in my own sight an action for which I should have been proud.

After all, said I to myself, what enormous service was it, that Falmouth should make me such a magnificent offer? I saved his life, true; but I would have saved Williams, or the meanest sailor on his yacht, had he been in the same danger.

It was, then, simply an instinctive movement on my part, and not the result of any fixed purpose.

And then had that action been any sacrifice on my part? No, I had not hesitated an instant. Then there was very little merit in it, because value of an action can only be judged by the sacrifice it involves.

A millionaire, giving a gold piece to a beggar, does nothing that appeals to our sympathy; but the beggar, dividing his louis with one who is more unfortunate than himself, appears sublime.

When I once began to consider the truth of such paradoxes, I never could stop.

My bravery was none the less belittled in my eyes.

When I behaved with so much bravery in my struggle with the pirates, did I for an instant think of sustaining the name of Frenchman or the honour of my country before those Englishmen, of chasing from the sea those pirates that infest it, of showing Falmouth that, in spite of the moral weakness of my nature, I at least possessed the courage of action? No; I had simply obeyed the instinct of self-preservation; I had struck blow for blow.

I wished to kill, in order not to be killed. Therefore, there was no more greatness nor bravery in my conduct than in the desperate rage of the animal that is brought to bay, and turns ferociously on its enemy.

Then as a last argument against myself, I said: Why is my heart filled with bitterness and sadness? Had my action been really grand, the high sentiments it aroused in me would not already have vanished, to give place to such doubts about Falmouth and myself.

Alas! the terrible conclusion of all these accursed doubts was not far off.

Now that I can reflect on my cruel blindness, I think that I must have been urged on to this pitiless analysis by a miserable jealousy that I dared not admit.

Not being capable of such devotion as that of Falmouth, I doubtless wished to account for it by some vile motive.

Perhaps I wished to escape from his influence that I was beginning to dread.

I made a sort of inventory of what Falmouth offered me, and what he owed me. It was almost like the catalogue of articles left by a dead man.

This was very evident, that the price Falmouth set on the service I had rendered was exorbitant.

Why did he offer me such an exorbitant price?

I had so reviled myself, I felt so ignoble and debased, that I could not believe a word of what he said about the sympathy he felt for me. Had he not told me that, by a delicate sense, he had always been able to select the choice souls for whom he felt an affinity?

How, then, should such a generous nature feel any attraction towards me, so unworthy, so incapable of inspiring affection?

What interest had he to feign this exaggerated affinity?

His name is much more illustrious than mine, his for-

tune is enormous, his position is of the highest. It is not vanity, then, that draws him towards me.

His courage is well known, he needs no one to defend him.

His mind is lively and original, and for years he has lived alone. He does not want me to amuse him by my conversation.

I was a long time, I admit, trying to discover what was Lord Falmouth's motive.

Suddenly, by dint of plunging into the abyss of hideous instincts, an infernal idea came into my mind.

I had a moment of execrable triumph: I had guessed it.

I thought all could be explained, all could be understood by this abominable interpretation.

I was seized with a horrible vertigo.

CHAPTER III.

THE DUEL.

I WROTE the following hasty lines in answer to Lord Falmouth's admirable letter.

I rang the bell and sent him the note.[1]

Just as it has always happened, no sooner was the letter gone than I came to my senses, and when I was able to think of the infamous outrage I had committed, I was overcome with horror.

What if I were mistaken?

I would have given my very life to have been able to recall those dreadful lines.

It was too late.

My cabin was only separated from Lord Falmouth's by a slight partition.

Seized by the most frightful anxiety, I listened. When the servant who had taken my letter to Falmouth closed the door, there was a dead silence. Then suddenly an impetuous movement upset a chair, and I heard Falmouth start towards the door with heavy and uncertain steps, for he could scarcely walk as yet.

He was coming.

My heart beat as though it was going to break.

His heavy steps came nearer.

I felt that I was breaking into a cold perspiration.

I was afraid!

[1] The whole of this letter is carefully erased in the Journal of an Unknown.

My door was suddenly opened. He entered holding himself up on his cane.

In all my life — no, never in all my life shall I forget the look of fiery rage that gleamed in his eyes. His face was like a marble mask lit up by two blazing eyeballs.

"Defend yourself!" cried he, in a voice that shook with indignation, and holding out my letter in his hand; "where is your weapon?"

A frightful remorse seized me, so violent was it that a cowardly retraction of my infamy was on my lips.

"Henry!" said I, in despair, pointing to my letter, "pardon!"

"Pardon! You don't mean to fight?" cried Falmouth, in a fury.

The blood rushed to my face, the shame of being thought a coward exasperated me, and I answered, "Monsieur, I will fight with whatever weapon you choose."

"Thanks for such extreme politeness. What weapon do you fight with? I have had enough of this," repeated he, savagely.

I was almost bursting with rage, but remembering that Falmouth was on his own yacht, I controlled myself.

"Both you and I," said I, "are too badly wounded to use our swords, — pistols would be the most suitable arm."

"That is quite true," said Falmouth, as he sank into an armchair.

He rang the bell.

One of his servants entered.

"Beg Mr. Williams to come below," said Falmouth. The *valet* went out.

"Williams and Geordy will be our seconds," said Falmouth, imperiously.

I gave a mechanical sign of assent, — I was annihilated.

Williams came down into the cabin.

"Where are we, Williams? What is the nearest land?"

"The wind has been from the north all the morning, my lord, and we are well on our way to Malta. If it keeps on at this rate, we will get there to-morrow evening."

"Try, then, my brave fellow, to get us there as soon as possible, — and give me your arm to help me back to my own cabin."

I was alone.

There is no need to say that I was plunged in despair.

Revived by a burning fever, my wound began to give me terrible pain.

Tossing every moment on the great waves that the north wind had raised up, and which were growing higher momentarily, the schooner leaped wildly forward.

This ploughing the sea caused me such agony that I could scarcely help screaming aloud. The doctor came to see how I was getting on, and from childish obstinacy I hid my suffering.

The man was paid for his services by Falmouth. I was determined to accept his services no longer.

What hours I passed! Great God, it was horrible!

The excitement that I had undergone, added to the fever, had raised my nervous sensibility to such a degree that, doubled up in bed, I hid my face in my hands, for the light was intolerable to me, and I wept bitterly. Usually tears were a relief to me, but these were bitter and scalding.

Then, when my despair was at its height, I contrasted it, in my usual way, with my sensations of only a few hours before. I compared that which was with that which had been, — that which might have been, — had I not with my own hand crushed, blighted, deliberately destroyed so many new opportunities for happiness!

Instead of hiding my shame in solitude and darkness, instead of these dreary and sad thoughts and this isolation which my own outrageous conduct had brought

upon me, I should be tranquilly seated by my friend, — my heart filled with grateful affection.

This man who now hated and despised me, who eagerly awaited the hour when he should wipe out with my blood the insult he had received, would be still there at my side, kind and solicitous for my comfort. These groans, wrung from me by physical suffering and which I tried so hard to stifle, would have been answered by the pitying voice of a brother in his attempt to comfort me.

And to think, great God! I cried out, that the reality of my dream of friendship was so near! To think that once again in my life, by the most unheard-of combination of circumstances, I had only to accept the happiness that was offered to me!

To think that once again a fatal monomania had forced me to exchange all these promises of felicity for the most fearful and lifelong remorse!

Then seeing that my grief was incurable, ideas of suicide came into my mind.

I reproached myself for being only a burden to myself and every one else. I asked myself, Of what use am I, and what have I done with the advantages that fortune had bestowed on me, — youth, health, strength, wealth, intelligence, and courage?

To what use had I put these precious gifts so far? To ruin all those who had loved me.

Thus I resolved that in this duel with Falmouth I would blindly expose my life and respect his.

I felt that in firing on him I should commit fratricide.

By a strange caprice I wished to read his letter once more.

Inexplicable fatality! for the first time I understood its greatness, — its imposing generosity.

Then it was that I finally understood the irreparable, tremendous loss I had sustained. But alas, alas! it was now too late, all was over, the end had come.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PILOT.

For the last few moments, the plunging of the yacht had become worse and worse. I could hear a continuous roaring, which became constantly more violent. Very soon there were flashes of lightning, followed by the deep rolling of distant thunder.

Sometimes I heard the hurried steps of the sailors overhead, then again the sound was hushed, and I heard the loud voice of Williams, giving orders.

I could no longer doubt of it; we were overtaken by a tempest. I could no longer remain inactive.

Feeble as I was, I tried to get up, hoping that the fresh air would do me good. I rang the bell, and, with the aid of my *valet de chambre*, succeeded in dressing.

I had almost completely lost the use of my left arm.

I went up on deck. Falmouth was not there.

The waves were furious.

Though it was only four o'clock, it was so dark that I could scarcely see.

On the horizon, the immense undulations of the waves were outlined against a band of gleaming light, the colour of red-hot iron.

Above this strip of blazing sky, the clouds were piled in heavy masses of ochre and black; the vault of the firmament was reflected in the sea, and the waves seemed to have lost their azure or emerald transparency, and looked like solid mountains streaked with foam.

The wind whistled through the ropes loudly and

furiously. Though blowing a gale, the wind was hot, and the water that it raised up in solid sheets, and dashed over the deck of the yacht, was warm.

Very soon the doctor came up on deck. "You are very imprudent," said he to me, "to leave your cabin."

"I was stifling down there, doctor, the motion of the ship made me almost crazy. I feel better up here."

"What frightful weather!" said the doctor. "If we can only get to Malta to anchor before night!"

"Are we not some distance off yet from that island?"

"We are very near, but that heavy cloud prevents our seeing land. In about an hour the yacht will put up a signal for a pilot, provided that in such a storm they can hear our cannon and see our signal."

An hour afterwards the sky became more clear.

We saw ahead of us, on the horizon, high hills, which were still covered with clouds; Williams said this was Cape Harrach, the northern point of the island of Malta, on the height of which was built the tower of Espinasse, which was used as a lookout. Williams then brought the yacht to, and fired several shots to call for a pilot.

"The wind is so strong," said the doctor, "that the pilots of Harrach don't dare to put out to sea."

In spite of which, after several salvos from the ship, we saw appear and disappear on the crest and in the trough of the waves a little lateen sail which was skilfully managed.

"Those Maltese must be intrepid sailors," said the doctor, "for, in spite of this tremendous sea, they are coming right out in the teeth of the wind."

The pilot-boat approached nearer and nearer, but as it was sometimes hidden by the high waves, and only reappeared after a long interval, at each one of its progressive appearances on the wave's crest it would seem to become unaccountably larger. This was a very natural circumstance, but it struck me as unnatural and ominous.

At length the boat was only about a gunshot off from the yacht.

By Williams's orders, a rope was thrown to it.

I leaned over the rail to get a better view of these hardy mariners.

There were five of them; four were busy managing the sails, while one held the rudder. After having very cleverly run alongside the yacht to catch the rope that had been thrown to them, the man who was steering, profiting by the moment when a great wave lifted up his boat almost to the deck of the yacht, leaped on board and clung to the shrouds.

The pilot, after saluting Williams, walked along the deck with a perfectly sure footing, in spite of the plunging of the yacht. One could see that he was an experienced navigator. Very soon he stopped, raised his head, and gave a connoisseur's look at the appointments of the yacht; they seemed to please him, for he gave a mute sign of approbation.

In spite of the tempest, and the dangers that the yacht was in, for night was coming on and the wind showed no signs of going down, this man was so calm and secure that the sailors of the yacht, who were beginning to show signs of anxiety, brightened up and were quite cheerful again. It was as if the pilot had brought with him this sudden sense of security, as the arrival of the family physician brings confidence and hope to an anxious mother.

As I stood near the bulwarks on which I had been leaning so as not to be thrown down by the plunging of the ship, I had not yet had a good look at the pilot, but he soon came near me.

The man was apparently about forty. He was tall, thin, and bony; his face very sunburnt, his cheeks hollow; his eyes were green, and his hair black and very thick. He wore a Scotch cap of red and blue plaid woollen stuff, which was pulled down to his eyebrows.

A cape of heavy brown cloth, dripping with salt water, hung down to the tops of his great fisherman's boots, and completed his costume.

It seemed to me that I had met this man before. I had a vague remembrance of just such a sinister face, though I found it impossible to recall the circumstances or place of our meeting; but there came over me an uncomfortable feeling which I attributed to my feverish condition.

"Can we get in to anchor at Malta to-night, pilot?" said Williams to him.

After having looked at the compass and questioned the state of the sky, the sea, and the wind, the pilot answered in very good English: "We might get to an island to-night, but not to the island of Malta, sir."

"No!" cried Williams; "and why not?"

"Because you can't, it is impossible," said the pilot, carelessly.

"But," continued Williams, "though the wind is very strong, and blowing from the north, it is not strong enough to send us ashore. The yacht sails beautifully, she rises with every wave."

"Could she resist a current that runs seven or eight knots an hour, sir, and that driving us right ashore the same way the wind is doing?"

"I tell you, pilot," replied Williams, "that two years ago I ran into the harbour of Malta in a worse storm than this."

"But not worse than what we are to have to-night," said the pilot.

"To-night?" replied Williams, incredulously.

"Yes, to-night," replied the pilot, firmly.

"How do you know that we will have a bad night, pilot?"

"The point of Tamea and the rocks of Kamich are all under water at sundown, and that is the sign of a terrible storm."

"That is all superstition and old women's tales!" exclaimed Williams.

The pilot gave him a look out of his piercing green eyes, shrugged his shoulders, and smiled. When the man smiled, I felt as though I had the nightmare, or an oppressive dream, for I recognised the sharp, white, pointed teeth of the pirate with whom I had struggled hand to hand when the yacht had been attacked.

My astonishment was so great, that I strode forward and stared at the pilot in a state of stupefaction; but he withstood my gaze with perfect indifference, and it was I who lowered my eyes, all abashed by the calm, unconcerned look he gave me.

Williams, who was impatient at the pilot's silence, and had noticed my astonishment, said to him, "But then, what do you propose to do?"

"If the weather continues to grow heavier, which I have no doubt of, sir, instead of running the risk of having your yacht driven ashore by the wind and the currents before it gets into the port of Malta, I advise you to double Point Harrach, and, instead of going ashore on the northern side of the island, to land on the southern coast in the little harbour of Marsa-Siroco, where you will find good anchorage. If, as you say, your yacht rises well to the wind, there will be nothing to prevent her manœuvring when she is once under shelter of the island, and, in case the storm grows worse, she will run no risk of being dashed ashore, because she will have before her the hundred leagues that separate Malta from the north coast of Africa."

"That proposition is a cowardly one, pilot," cried out Williams; "a Flemish tub would do better than that. My lord wishes positively to anchor in the port of Malta to-night, and I say it can be done."

"Then you must take the wheel yourself, sir," replied the pilot, with his independent air; then going astern, he called in English to the sailors who had remained in

his sailboat, "Hello! Hello, there; get ready to cast off, we are going back to Harrach."

When I heard the clear and penetrating voice of the pilot, except the different language, it surely sounded like the voice and accent of the man in the black hood, who, a moment before the boarding of the yacht, cried out to his pirate crew, "Don't fire! Board her!"

Williams, seeing that the pilot was really getting ready to leave, told him to wait a moment, and he would go and consult with my lord; then he disappeared.

I remained on deck in a state of the greatest perplexity.

I was almost sure that I recognised the voice and the peculiar teeth of this man, but could not this be a remarkable case of similarity? What chance was there that a man who had been wounded and thrown into the sea, barely eight days ago, should be this Maltese pilot, so vigorous and strong?

I continued to watch the pilot steadily; he never changed countenance. Tired, no doubt, of being so fixedly stared at, he advanced towards me, and said, boldly:

"What have you got to say to me, monsieur?"

"Have you been a pilot at Malta any length of time?" I asked him.

"For the last seven years, monsieur," and he showed me his large silver medal, hung on a long chain of the same metal, which he wore under his cape.

On the medal I read the name Joseph Belmont, royal pilot, No. 18. On the other side of the medal were the royal arms of England.

"But you are a Frenchman," said I to him, speaking French.

"*Oui*, monsieur," he replied.

I was more astonished even than before.

Williams now appeared on deck, and, addressing the pilot, said:

"Go ahead, do as you think best. My lord has given his consent."

"The sea is getting so rough," said the pilot to Williams, "that I am going to tell my sailors to heave off the tow-rope, and follow us a little ways off." So the sailboat, abandoning the tow-rope, continued to follow in our wake.

Night was coming on.

According to the usual custom, Williams handed his speaking-trumpet, the sign of command, to the pilot.

The predictions of the latter as to the weather were soon realised, for though the new direction we had taken put us, in a short time, under the lee of the island, and in a sheltered position, the tempest augmented in violence.

The pilot, standing at the helm, gave his orders with perfect calmness, and Williams admitted that he managed the ship with rare ability and coolness.

While waiting for the moon to rise, which would facilitate our coming to anchor, we were skirting along the coast, parallel to the southern shore of the island of Malta.

The night was very dark.

The lamps of the compasses, shut up in their copper boxes, shone in a pale circle on the deck, at the foot of the mainmast.

This light shone only on the pilot and the helmsman, while the rest of the yacht remained plunged in an obscurity that the contrasting luminous circle only made darker. Lit up from below, as actors are by the footlights of the theatre, the features of the pilot had a peculiar expression of audacity, deceit, and wickedness.

Although the sea was tremendous, so that the prow of the yacht was almost constantly covered by the furious waves, from time to time I could see the pilot rub his hands with savage satisfaction, and laugh in a way that showed his white, sharp, and wide-apart teeth.

In these moments I believed thoroughly that I rec-

ognised the pirate with whom I had fought. This idea became so fixed in my mind that, in spite of my resolve to say nothing on the subject, I could not help asking Williams if he was perfectly sure of the man.

"As sure as one can be of anything! Our marine council of the port of Malta never gives a pilot's commission except to reliable and experienced men. This man showed me his patent, it is according to the regulations. Besides, you can see for yourself what a skilful sailor he is, and I begin to believe he was right. Though we are sheltered by the land, you see how the ship is straining under the violence of the wind. Such a storm, with a strong current setting in towards the coast, would have easily wrecked the yacht."

"You may think I am out of my mind," said I to Williams, after some hesitation, "but I am sure I know who this pilot is."

"Who is he, monsieur?"

"The pirate captain that I fought with, and that I thought was at the bottom of the sea."

"It is so dark that I can't see your face, monsieur," said Williams, "but I am sure you are laughing at me."

"No; I swear I am speaking very seriously."

"But, monsieur, remember that is quite impossible. I tell you that the position of a pilot is only given to trustworthy men; they cannot leave their posts except to pilot ships that wish to enter the harbour. Remember that the mysterious pirate had already been anchored for more than a month off Porquerolles before my lord's yacht got to the island of Hyères. Remember that — but," said Williams, interrupting himself, and leaving me, "there is the moon rising, and the clouds are clearing away; the moonlight will help us to get to the anchorage. Excuse me, monsieur, but I am going to get out the anchors."

The reasons Williams gave me were not at all convincing, though they seemed sensible. However, seeing

that the hour of debarkation was approaching, and that experienced sailors considered that the pilot had managed the ship very skilfully and prudently, I was forced to suspend my judgment, for, so far, no one had a word of reproach for the man I suspected.

The doctor came up on deck, gave me the news of Falmouth, and asked how I was feeling.

"The fresh air has done me good," said I, "and my wound pains me less."

"Thanks be to God for that," said he. "My lord is feeling better also; his contusion was a bad one, but the effect will soon go off. Just now he was able to walk by himself. The pilot was right," added the doctor, as he pointed to the waves; "see how calm the sea is growing, now that we are getting near the shore of the island."

In fact, sheltered from the violence of the wind by the circle of high rocky hills that form the southern shore of Malta, the waves were going down more and more. Soon the moon, coming entirely out from the clouds that had hidden her until now, shone brightly on an immense wall of rocks which was stretched out before us, the waves dashing against their base.

The yacht was then a cannon's shot distant from the shore we were sailing past; the pilot-boat was a little way behind us.

"Are we almost to the harbour of Marsa-Siroco?" said Williams, who knew the different anchorages of the island.

"We will very soon be there; but, as we have to pass between the Black Rocks and the Point de la Wardi, and as the passage is very dangerous on account of the breakers, I will, if you please, monsieur, take the rudder," said the pilot to Williams. On a sign from the latter, the helmsman left the bar.

I remember all this as though it happened yesterday.

I was seated on the bulwarks.

Before me stood Williams, very near the pilot who

had taken the helm, looking attentively at the compass, the shore, and the sails of the yacht.

The doctor, leaning over the stern, watched the sea in our wake. At some distance we could see the pilot-boat; she did not appear to be following us any more, but was going in another direction. This was very singular, I thought.

In front of us, and very close at hand, rose an enormous mass of perpendicular rocks.

Though the sea had become much more calm, it was still raised by a tremendous swell whose waves crashed against the shore with a formidable noise.

The pilot had ordered another sail to be put up, no doubt to augment the speed of the yacht. This was scarcely done when a frightful cry was heard from the bow, "Helm aport! We are on the breakers!"

I never knew how the pilot obeyed this order, or how he managed the yacht; for, at the instant the cry of warning was heard, a horrible crash, followed by a loud, cracking sound, stopped the yacht short.

The shock was so violent that I, Williams, and two of the sailors, were thrown on the deck.

"The yacht is ashore!" cried Williams, as he got up. "Damn the pilot!"

My wound prevented me from rising as quickly as Williams. I was still lying on the deck, when some one rushed past me rapidly, a heavy body fell into the sea, and the pilot was no longer to be seen at the helm or on the deck.

Remembering my suspicion of the man, and forgetting the danger we were in, I rose up, and saw, at a gunshot's distance from us, the pilot-boat; its sailors were rowing hard towards a black spot, surrounded by foam, that I could easily see in the moonlight.

It was the pilot, who was swimming to get back to his boat.

"A gun! Give me a gun!" I cried out. "I knew it was he!"

At this moment the yacht struck for the second time on the rocks, and the mainmast fell, with a terrific crash.

Following the crash, there was a moment of silence and stupefaction, in which I heard these words in French, "Remember the mystic of Porquerolles!"

It was the pirate, — the yacht was a wreck.

The last scene of this drama was so confused, so hurried that I can scarcely recall it. Everything was confusion and chaos, frightful scenes followed one another, as thunder-claps succeed one another in a storm. At the third shock the yacht was raised up by an immense wave, and fell with all its weight on a ledge of sharp rocks. Already split in two, the keel went to pieces. I heard the water rushing into the ship's hold with a horrible sound.

The ship had filled with water!

In spite of my wound, which kept one of my hands bound to my side, I was about to jump into the sea, when I saw Falmouth come up from below; he was assisted by Williams.

At this moment another great wave took the ship sideways, and completely engulfed it.

I felt myself rolling to the edge of the ship, then I was lifted up and stunned by a crushing weight of water which passed over me roaring like thunder.

From that moment I lost all perception of what was happening to me.

All that I can remember is that I felt a frightful weight. I stifled when I opened my mouth for breath. I swallowed great mouthfuls of warm salt water, my ears were bursting with pain, a great weight prevented me from seeing. I felt that I was drowning. With all this, I continued my desperate efforts to swim. Then I seemed to breathe more freely. I saw the sky, and near

me a mass of reddish rocks. I felt a strong hand raise me by my hair, and I heard the voice of Falmouth, who said, "Now we are quits! Good-bye."

I remembered nothing more, for I very soon fell into a painful numbness, and then became insensible.

DAPHNÉ — NOÉMI — ANATHASIA

CHAPTER V.

THE ISLAND OF KHIOS.

I FIND this fragment of memoirs written a year after the wreck of Lord Falmouth's yacht off the coast of Malta.

If I had the least literary pretension, I would not dare to say that these pages, written on the spur of the moment, depict very accurately the enchanting scenes in the midst of which I had been living for the last year in the sweetest of *far-nientes*.

In truth, the paradise I had created for myself seems to come again before my eyes, with its luxury of antique beauty, its palace of white marble gilded by the sunshine, its intoxicating perfumes coming from the orange groves that stand off against the blue sky that frames so magnificently the dark waters of the coast of Asiatic Europe.

That year should have been the happiest year of my life; for those few charmed days never caused me the least moral suffering. Not once did I feel any remorse, not once did I feel my heart.

But, alas! why was not the soul killed in such scenes of happiness? Why was not the mind overpowered by the the senses? Why did thought survive the struggle?

Thought! that power of man! Man's true power, in fact; for it is fatal, like all powers.

Thought, that blazing crown, that burns and consumes the forehead that wears it!

According to my custom of classifying pleasant memories, I had entitled this fragment, "Days of Sunshine."

The light and careless tone that frequently appears in this souvenir offers a singular contrast to the sombre and heart-breaking events of the former chapters in this journal.

Days of Sunshine.

ISLE OF KHIOS, 20 June, 18—.

I know not what the future has in store for me, but, as I often said in my days of sadness and desolation, "one must distrust one's self more than one's destiny." I hope one day, as I read these pages, to be able to see again the smiling scenes amidst which I am now living so happily.

I write this the 20th of June, 18—, in the palace of Carina, situated on the eastern coast of the island of Khios, about a year after the loss of the yacht.

In that great peril, poor Henry saved my life. In spite of his wound, he was swimming vigorously towards shore, when, seeing me about to drown, for I could scarcely use my left arm, he seized me with one hand, and, fighting the waves with the other, he landed me on the shore in a dying condition.

My strength was quite exhausted by the excitement of the combat, by my wound, and by my desperate efforts at the time of the wreck; for I was for many long days a prey to burning fever and wild delirium from which I was restored to health by the excellent care of the doctor whom Falmouth had left behind.

I was so dangerously ill that I had to be carried to Marsa-Siroco, a little Maltese suburb, near the coast where the yacht had gone ashore. I remained in that village until my complete recovery, when the fever left me, and I was able to converse; the doctor told me the

circumstances I have just recorded, and handed me a letter from Falmouth, which I copy in this journal.

"After all, my dear count, I prefer having saved you from drowning, to having put a bullet in your head, or perhaps having received from you a similar proof of friendship.

"I hope that the vigorous *douche* that you have received will have a good effect on you, and save you from another fit of insanity.

"My plans are changed, or rather become what they were at first. I desire more than ever to satisfy my fancy about that incendiary, Canaris; but as that diabolical piratical pilot (May he come to the gallows!) has wrecked my poor yacht, I have chartered a vessel at Malta, and am off for Hydra.

"Good-bye. If we ever meet again we will laugh at all this. H. FALMOUTH.

"P. S. I leave you the doctor, for the Maltese doctors are said to be detestable. He will hand you a letter of recommendation to the lord governor of the island.

"Send me the doctor when you have no further need of his services."

I have become so stupid from the life of pleasure I have been leading, that I scarcely remember the effect this sarcastic letter had on me.

When I arrived at Malta I called on Lord P——, who showed me great courtesy. He caused active search to be made for the pretended pilot. That wretch had actually been at one time a member of the Royal Navy, but, for two years past, he had given up his position as pilot in the island of Malta.

A description of him was sent throughout the whole

Archipelago, where he was supposed to be engaged in piracy.

At Lord P——'s I met a certain Marquis Justiniani, a descendant of that ancient and illustrious family, the Justiniani of Genoa, which had given dukes to Venice and sovereigns to some of the Grecian islands. The marquis owned many country places in the island of Khios, which had just been ravaged by the Turks. He spoke to me about a palace called the Carina Palace, built towards the end of the sixteenth century by the Cardinal Angelo Justiniani. The marquis had for a long time rented the palace to an aga. The description of the palace and the climate seduced me, so I proposed to go to Khios, to visit the palace and the park, and to rent or buy the place if it suited me.

We left together, and disembarked here after a three days' voyage. The Turks had left bloody traces of their passage everywhere; they were in garrison in the castle of Khios.

As I was a Frenchman, thanks to the firm attitude of our navy and our consuls in the Orient, I would be in perfect security in case of my deciding to dwell in Khios.

I inspected the palace, it suited me, and the business was settled.

The next day my interpreter brought to me a renegade Jew, who proposed that I should purchase a dozen beautiful Grecian slave girls, the spoils of the last Turkish raid in the islands of Samos and Lesbos.

Of these twelve girls, the eldest of whom was only twenty, there were three who were too refined and delicate to be put to work, and were therefore suitable for companionship.

The nine others, tall, robust, and very beautiful, could work either in the garden or in the house. He only demanded two thousand piastres apiece, about five hundred francs of our money.

In order to induce me to buy them, the renegade told me, confidentially, that a Tunisian officer, purveyor of the Bey's harem, had made him an offer; but that he liked to see his slaves well treated and so preferred selling them to me, knowing what harsh treatment the poor creatures would receive on board the Barbary *chebek* that was to take them to Tunis.

I expressed a desire to see the slaves.

The marvellous type of Grecian beauty has been so well preserved in this favoured clime, that, out of these twelve girls of every sort and condition, there was not one who was not really pretty, and three of them were perfectly beautiful women.

The bargain concluded, I sent the twelve women to the Carina Palace with two negro dwarfs, who were so deformed as to be positively picturesque, that the renegade presented me with by way of a contrast. They were all under the surveillance of an old Cypriote, that the Jew recommended as a housekeeper.

This sudden resolution to go to the Isle of Khios, and there to live at leisure, forgetting all things and every one, had been suggested to me a year ago, by the torturing remembrance of the great sorrow that overwhelmed me.

After my quarrel with Falmouth, whom I had so basely provoked, fully aware that I was unworthy of all generous affection, since I was constantly seeking the meanest motives, I believed that a perfectly sensual life would admit of neither these fears nor doubts.

What had made me so unhappy until now? Was it not from a dread of being deceived by my feelings? The dread of being mistaken should I allow myself to love? What, then, should I risk in devoting the remainder of my life to material love?

Nature is so rich, so fecund, so inexhaustible, that I

can never weary of admiring her marvels, from henceforth I would doubt of nothing.

The perfume of a beautiful flower is not imaginary, the splendours of a magnificent landscape are real, beautiful forms are not deceptive. What interested motive could I impute to the flower that perfumes the air, the bird that sings, the wind murmuring softly through the leaves, the sea breaking on the beach, to nature, that unfolds so many treasures, colours, melodies, and fragrances?

It is true I will be all alone to enjoy these marvels, but solitude pleases me. I possess a deep sense of material beauty, which will be sufficient to make up for my want of faith in moral beauty.

The sight of luxuriant nature, of a fine horse or dog, a flower or a beautiful woman, or even a lovely sunset, has always given me exquisite pleasure, and though religious faith is unfortunately lacking in me, when I behold the splendours of creation I always feel transports of heartfelt gratitude towards the unknown power that heaps such treasures on us.

Regretting the faculties of which I am deprived, I will at least make the most of those I possess; and since I can not be happy through the mind, let me be so through the senses.

This I said to myself, and I was not mistaken, for never have I enjoyed such perfect happiness.

Falmouth was the best, the noblest of men. I know it. But when I compare my present life of felicity with the life of study and politics that Henry depicted in such glowing colours, the only thing I regret is the friendship that I destroyed by my awful suspicions.

Henry was quite right when he said that idleness was the source of all my miseries; so I have spent my time in the making of living pictures on which I can at all times gaze. It has taken much toil, and even study, to surround myself with all these marvels of creation,

to get together all the scattered riches of this Garden of Eden.

Sages may tell us that these are but childish pleasures, but it is their simplicity that constitutes their pleasantness.

Serious immaterial joys are but perishable, while the thousand little pleasures a youthful nature can always discover in his reveries, though trifling and momentary, are constantly being renewed, for the imagination that produces them is inexhaustible.

Now that I have lived in such adorable independence, the life of society, with its exigencies, appears to me as a sort of order whose rules are as strict as those of the "Trappists."

I do not know which I would prefer, to be comfortably clothed in a serge gown, or cramped up in a tight coat; to breathe the pure fresh air of the garden I cultivated or the stifling atmosphere of a crowded salon; to kneel through the service of matins, or to stand all evening at some reception. In fact, I think I should as willingly choose the meditative silence of the cloister as the chatter of the salon; and say with about as much interest, "Brother, we must die," of the religious order, as "Brother, we must amuse ourselves," of the social order.

One thing only astonishes me, it is that I have been so long without knowing where true happiness lies.

When I think of the burdensome, obscure, and narrow life that most men impose upon themselves, through routine, in unhealthy cities, in damp climates, with hardly a ray of sunshine, without flowers, without perfume, surrounded by a degenerate, ugly, and sickly race, when they could live as I do without a care, as a monarch among the exquisite beauties of nature in a marvellous climate, I sometimes fear that my paradise will suddenly be invaded.

Thus I congratulate myself every day on my determi-

nation, my cup runs over with pleasure, my most painful remembrances fade away from my mind, and my soul has become so dulled from intoxicating joys, that the past has become a mere dream of misery.

Hélène, Marguerite, Falmouth, the remembrance of you is growing dim, far away, hidden under a beautiful cloud. I sometimes wonder how we could have caused each other so much suffering.

But what do I hear under my windows? It is the sound of the Albanian harp. It is Daphné, who invites Noémi and Anathasia to dance the national dance, the Romaïque.

May this description of all that surrounds me, the smiling scene that I gaze on while writing these lines, here in Khios, in the Carina Palace, remain on these unseen pages as a faithful picture of a charming reality.

No doubt these details would seem childish to any other than myself, but it is a portrait I wish to paint, and a portrait by Holbein, seen and painted with scrupulous fidelity; for, if ever I should happen to regret this happy period of my life, every stroke of the brush would be of inestimable value to me.

CHAPTER VI.

DAYS OF SUNSHINE — THE PALACE.

LIKE all palaces of modern Italy, the Palace of Carina, built by the Genoese when the island of Khios was one of their possessions, the Palace of Carina is immense. The apartments are splendid, but unfurnished. The Mussulman who occupied it before me had furnished one wing of the vast building after the Oriental fashion.

It is that wing that I live in. It is there that I retire during the burning heat of the day, for the windows open towards the north, and there is a delightful breeze.

Window-screens of fragrant bamboo half close the windows and permit me to enjoy the view while remaining in a soft obscurity.

The walls are covered with a silvery stucco, which glimmers like white satin, and are divided into panels of alternate lilac and green, where can be read in golden letters several verses of the Koran. The ceiling is richly painted, and divided into panels of lilac and green, with borders of golden arabesques.

A thick Persian carpet covers the floor. At the end of this room, a fountain of limpid water gushes from a basin of Oriental jasper, and falls in cascades with a gentle murmur. Great blue and gold vases, filled with flowers on which some tame doves come and perch, surround the fountain, and the aromatic perfume of the flowers reaches me in a fragrant mist.

Must I admit this fact? The pleasures of the senses are dear to me, and I delight in their satisfaction.

Thus, near me on a table, that is covered with a thick

Turkish table-cloth of a yellow shade, embroidered with blue flowers that glitter with silver threads, are sorbets of oranges and the wild cherry, in porous vases that are covered with an icy moisture; golden pineapples, slices of watermelon, with their green rind and red pulp, — all these are shining through pieces of ice that fill great Japanese bowls; on another dish is a pyramid of exquisite fruit, that the dark-eyed Daphné has intermingled with flowers.

In a few moments the sprightly Noémi will fill my crystal cup with the generous wine of Cyprus or Scyros or Madeira, which have been standing in their Venetian decanters exposed to a tepid atmosphere.

If I wish to indulge in soft reverie, to fill my idle brain with delightful dreams, Anathasia, the blonde, will smilingly offer me my narghile filled with jasmine water, or my long pipe with the amber mouthpiece, whose bowl she will fill with the fragrant tobacco of Latakia.

And finally, should I wish to abandon my day-dreams, and give myself up to the thoughts of others, I have them near at hand, the works of the poets I love: Shakespeare, Goethe, Schiller, Scott; the great, the divine, the modern Homer, — Byron, whose black yacht I saw pass on the horizon yesterday.

Although the air is cool, it is saturated with perfume; the vapours of aloes and myrrh, burning in small ruby jars, mingle their odour with that of the flowers, for since I mean to live for the senses, let me not forget the sense of smelling.

I have given myself up enthusiastically to my enjoyment of delightful smells, a sense so misunderstood or so blamed. I have realised my dream of arranging a scale of perfumes, beginning at the faintest, and gradually ascending to the most powerful odours, the inhaling of which causes a sort of intoxication, which adds a new ecstasy to voluptuousness.

Besides, one could almost live on perfumes on the island of Khios, for it is the island which furnished all the perfumes to the harems, the essences of rose, jasmin, and tuberose, which are used in the seraglio of the sultanas.

Khios alone produces the precious lentisk, whose gum the dreamy and indolent odalisk chews between her ivory teeth; Khios, whose commerce even has a charming suggestion of elegance, for her exports are silks, tapestries, flowers, fruits, birds, and honey. And it is young girls and beautiful women of the purest antique type who gather the treasures of the island, the most favoured of all the islands of Ionia.

From the windows of the apartment I occupy, in one of the wings of this immense dwelling, I gaze on a beautiful scene.

May its remembrance be an everlasting regret, if ever I leave this adorable retreat for some dark and noisy city, with a horizon of high walls, filthy streets, and close atmosphere.

On my left is the front of the palace, whose carved porticos, arcades, and white marble staircases seem endless.

From its porphyry inlaid basement, to its roof, adorned with balustrades, statues, and great vases filled with myrtle and oleanders, the whole building is bathed in sunshine, and its golden silhouette stands out against a sky of that sapphire blue which is only seen in the East.

In the distance the azure of the sky would blend with the azure of the sea, were it not for a wavy line of purplish red. This is the chain of the mountains of Roumania, whose summits are bathed in brilliant clouds.

On the right hand, as a contrast to that dazzling mass of marble and of sunshine, there is a lawn of clover, where some of the large Syrian sheep, with their heavy tails, are grazing, also a few gazelles with silvery coats.

Beyond the lawn, and extending in a parallel direction with the palace, I see a deep, damp, and shady wood.

The gigantic tops of the oak-trees, the cedars, and the secular platanes form an ocean of dark verdure. The sun is setting, and, with its glowing rays, throws a golden light on those masses of foliage.

On that waving curtain of dark and opaque green, a thousand other shades of green are visible, which become more faint and transparent as they approach the banks of the River Belophano, which, widening in front of the palace, forms a sort of lake.

The banks are planted with bladdernut-trees, umbrella pines with their reddish trunks, satin-leaved poplars, arbutus, and buckthorn. On these, once in awhile, shines a ray of sunlight, which slips beneath the great domes of verdure whenever the sea breeze lifts their branches.

Near the shore, there are fan-leaved latanias, whose trunks are hidden beneath vines that bear orange-coloured bell-flowers, and hydrangeas, whose flowers are rose-coloured.

Then there are wide green avenues, where the sun's rays scarcely ever penetrate, which are carpeted by soft grass, and lead to a hemicycle of foliage, quite near the palace.

These paths are so long and shady that I cannot see their end, through the bluish vapour that veils them.

Lastly, in the foreground, and on a level with my window, is a terrace of white marble, adorned with vases and statues. From this, you can descend to the banks of the canal.

Protected by the palace, one half of the staircase is in the shade, the other is bathed in the sunlight. On one of the lower steps a black dwarf, that I have dressed in a scarlet doublet in Venetian style, is sleeping beside two greyhounds of great size and beautiful form.

By a caprice of the sunlight, the dwarf is in the daz-

zling zone of its rays, which seem to cover each step with gold dust, while the greyhounds are in the shadow, which is unequally traced on the staircase, and throws its cool, blue, transparent shadows on the white coats of the sleeping dogs.

A little farther on, a peacock sits perched on the balustrade in the bright sun. His feathers flash like a rain of rubies, topazes, and emeralds, glittering against a background of ultramarine.

Swans swim slowly in the canal, and seem to drag behind them thousands of silvery ribbons; tall, rose-coloured flamingoes walk solemnly along the shore, while, farther off, two crimson parrots quarrel for the fruit of the latania-trees. When they unfold their turquoise wings, they display their long wing-feathers, tinted with gold and purple.

On a tuft of amaryllis, a beautiful yellow popinjay, whose neck reflects the tints of the rainbow, opens out his long white tail-feathers, while the swallows and kingfishers lightly skim over the waters of the canal.

I have just read over these pages, which give a perfect description of the marvellous scene that I look on. All is mentioned. But how feebly words can depict such a spectacle! The relation they bear to the reality is only such as the dry nomenclature of the naturalist to the beautiful object he describes.

CHAPTER VII.

DAYS OF SUNSHINE — THE GREEK NATIONAL DANCE.

I HEAR peals of silvery laughter, and beyond the last steps of the staircase, which half conceals them, the playful figures of some of my slave girls appear. They are bathing in the river.

Some of them, holding their beautiful arms above their heads, twist their long brown hair, from which a rain of liquid pearls rolls down on to their bosoms and their bare backs. Others, holding each other's hands, advance timidly on the sandy shore of the lake; they bow their heads, and pretend to be afraid.

Nothing could be more beautiful than their pure and delicate profiles, which stand out like alabaster against the luminous horizon, like white cameos on a transparent stone.

Their hair is twisted in a knot low on the back of their heads, and leaves their little ears exposed; their necks are round and white, and all the lines of their bodies are as elegant as those of the ancient Greeks.

Not far from this charming group, skipping on the close-cut grass that extends from the wood to the banks of the canal, Noémi and Anathasia, wearing the beautiful costume of the island of Khios, are dancing the "Romaïque," to the music of the Albanian harp which Daphné plays.

The verdant hemicycle protects them from the oblique rays of the sun. Great beds of roses, wallflowers, Persian lilacs, and tuberoses surround their leafy parlour.

These flower beds are constantly plundered by thousands of gaudy butterflies: the "Ulysses," whose wings are bright green with amethyst spots, the "Marsyas" of a deep blue, or the "Danaë," which is a velvety brown, striped with mother-of-pearl.

Happy girls! How well they love to dance to the sound of Daphné's lyre! Daphné is one of three girls the renegade told me were only fit for amusement.

Daphné was carried off from Lesbos by the Turks. Her noble proportions and severely beautiful face remind one of the grand type of the Venus de Milo.

She is seated on a mossy bank. Her complexion is of a rosy white; her eyes, her eyebrows, her eyelashes, and her hair are as black as ebony; a string of gold coins passes over her forehead, and is fastened in the thick braid of hair behind her head.

Daphné wears a straw-coloured tunic and a white robe; she bends slightly forward, and curves her white naked arms around the Albanian lyre that rests on her knees. One leg stretched forward reveals a charming ankle, covered with a bright pink silk stocking, such as they weave here in the island, and a little black Turkish slipper embroidered with silver is on her foot.

According to the custom of modern Greeks, Daphné sings as she plays, while the two girls who dance repeat the refrain.

This is a translation of their words; there is nothing very remarkable about them, and yet they fill one with passionate languor when sung as Daphné can sing them. A young bridegroom is speaking to his bride:

"I am wounded by thy love, alas!
Ah, young maiden! I am consumed by thy love.
I am stricken to the heart.
Let me possess your charms and the flames devour your dower.
Oh, young maiden, I love thee with all my soul,
And thou hast abandoned me,
Like a withered plant."

Noémi and Anathasia seem to act the words by their expressive pantomime.

Noémi, the brunette, who takes the part of the lover, is manly and resolute, while the poses of the blonde Anathasia are timid, supplicating, and chaste, like those of a young girl who shuns or fears the caresses of her lover.

Noémi is tall and slender. Her hair is a golden auburn; her eyebrows and lashes are thick and black, and her eyes are dark gray.

Nothing is more voluptuous than those large, liquid eyes. Her brown skin is perhaps rather too dark, and her mocking, sensual lips too brilliantly scarlet, so violently do they contrast with her white teeth; her smile almost too passionate. Her upper lip is shaded by the slightest possible streak of brown, and her pink nostrils dilate at each movement of her breast, which rises and falls, as she dances, under her close-fitting "yellak," or jacket of cherry-coloured satin. Two long tresses, tied with red satin ribbon, fall from under her scarlet "fez" and reach below her round, flexible waist, that seems smaller by contrast with her broad hips, under their orange-coloured skirt. Nothing was ever more nimble than her little feet, shod in red morocco slippers embroidered with gold.

Anathasia, on the contrary, is petite. Her beautiful fair hair falls in plaits on each side of her cheeks, which are as fresh and rosy as a baby's. Her complexion is dazzingly fair, and her sweet blue eyes, under their long lashes, seem to reflect all the azure of the Ionian skies.

When the ardent Noémi, singing the words of the despairing lover, approaches her with supplicating and passionate gestures, Anathasia's little mouth, as scarlet as a cherry, becomes quite serious, and she assumes a candid and adorable expression of alarmed innocence. She recoils with a frightened look, and clasps her pretty hands, that are as white as ivory.

THE GREEK NATIONAL DANCE.

Anathasia is all in white.

I had often dreamed of a sylph lightly touching the grass with the tips of its slender feet. Such a fairy is Anathasia, whose tiny proportions are of exquisite refinement.

Never was there such a combination of beauty. My fancy had dictated this arrangement, which included all that was lovely in nature.

I was young; all this beauty belonged to me; my life was divided between sensual ravishments and the delights of the intellect.

What further happiness could I imagine than to live for ever in this enchanting land, forgetful of the past, and hopeful for the future, which must always be as happy; for would not gold ensure me the possession of such wealth as was now before me?

I am so completely happy that I feel an imperative need of giving thanks to the power that bestows on me so many blessings.

CHAPTER VIII.

BELIEF.

ISLE OF KHIOS, October, 18—.

I take up my journal again after three months of interruption. I left off at the description of the Carina Palace and its inhabitants, — such a minute description that it was like an architect's working drawing, or a slave merchant's inventory.

I consult my moral thermometer. I find myself very well, my head is perfectly clear, and I am cheerful and gay.

I feel as though I were dreaming when I look over the pages of my journal that I brought with me from France, and find that I used to be sad, dreamy, and melancholy.

September has just come to an end; the rainy weather which precedes the equinox has cooled the atmosphere. The west wind whistles through the long galleries of the palace. I have left the ground floor for a more cosy and comfortable apartment. I am almost deafened with noise.

Awhile ago the parrots, the peacocks, and the popinjays, showing their sagacity, and, no doubt, feeling the approaching change in temperature, all began to shriek at once in the most atrocious manner. Such a proof of their intelligence made me terribly nervous.

Why is Nature so inconsistent in her gifts? Dazzling plumage, discordant voice!

This is not all; frightened by the racket, the greyhounds began to bark furiously. Then the dwarfs came with whips and yells, and augmented the noise while trying to stop it.

I have taken refuge here, but can still hear the infernal screaming of the parrots. All these charming accessories of the scenes that surround me are lovely to look at when they are in their proper place, but I do not care for "tableaux" that shriek.

From animals let us pass to human beings; the transition will not be difficult, for the minds of my beautiful girls are not much more developed than the brains of the parrots and popinjays, and though sometimes they are as noisy as the latter, their screams have not the advantage of foretelling rainy or clear weather.

Speaking of screams, I am sorry that Noémi and Daphné have had a quarrel, but the excessive violence of those good creatures is the result of their want of education. Nevertheless, and although I am tolerant, it seems to me that stabbing one's comrade in the arm is carrying things too far, so I have given Noémi a serious scolding.

I strongly suspect Anathasia, the blonde, with her childish and innocent air, to be the cause of the quarrel, and to have slyly excited those two brave girls to fight each other like two fighting-cocks. To be sure, this was suggested to me by the wicked old Cypriote, and she detests everything that is young or pretty.

Noémi, in fact, is growing more and more ill-tempered. The other day she slapped Chloë, my gardener, violently, Chloë, who has such white teeth and such black eyes. She beat her because she brought in the fruit too late, and so my dessert was behindhand.

After all, Noémi has some good points, but she is deucedly irascible and fierce.

One thing that astonishes me is the fact that these girls are completely insensible to the beauties of nature.

Thanks to the Greek I learned at college, I am able to understand and speak modern Greek passably well, and I have often tried to awaken in these girls some poetic sentiment. All was in vain; nothing was ever more barbaric or uncultivated than their minds.

With the exception of some Greek national songs, they know nothing at all.

They can neither read nor write. Their rivalries, their jealousies, their calumnies, and a few exaggerated tales of Turkish cruelty, furnish the subjects of their usual conversation.

In other ways they are the best of girls. I remember a scene, which shows marvellously well the characters of my three favourites.

I was mounting a Syrian horse I had purchased, for the first time. He became excited, reared, and fell on me. Noémi flew at the horse, caught him by the bridle, and beat him with a whip. Daphné ran to help me up. Anathasia never moved, but burst into tears and then fainted away.

Some time ago I tried to awaken the souls of these poor girls to some remembrances of their Fatherland, — a sentiment that is so strong in half-civilised natures.

It was not without some hesitation that I made the attempt. I felt a certain remorse at the idea of awakening sad recollections.

Poor girls! They lived in slavery, and their melancholy thoughts must often turn with regret to the land of their youth. Poor caged swallows! they only awaited an opportunity of flying home to their nests.

I feared it would be cruel to raise false hopes in their breasts; still, I assembled my household, and told them that I was going to leave the island, and send them all back to their respective homes.

I must declare, and with a certain amount of satisfaction, that they immediately broke into lamentations

that would have done honour to the funeral of Achilles, or the dirge of some illustrious Albanian chieftain.

Daphné wrapped her head in her veil, and sat silent and motionless on the ground, like an antique statue of grief. Noémi manifested her rage by beating one of the black dwarfs, while the fair Anathasia, falling on her knees, took my hand and kissed it; then raising her beautiful tearful eyes to mine, said, in her soft Ionian tongue:

"Oh, master! master! When you have gone, what will become of your poor Grecian girls?"

"But your aged fathers! Your poor old mothers! Your brave brothers and your handsome lovers!" I exclaimed. "Do you never think of them, forgetful creatures that you are?"

Feeling sure that such magical words would have an effect, I drew my cloak around me with a majestic air.

But the crying and sobbing only grew the louder, and they all cried out, in what I thought a threatening way:

"We will never leave the roof of the good Frank; we are happy at Khios; we will stay at Khios with the good Frank."

Though I was their "good Frank," I could not help having but a poor idea of their patriotism; the preference they gave me over their native soil and its accessories was certainly flattering.

I resolved to make another attempt, and told them that I would give each of them two thousand piastres and their clothes, and let them go wherever they wished, for I meant to leave the island.

The screams and curses that were the result of my innocent proposition so alarmed me, that for a moment I feared I should share the fate of Orpheus.

Letting go of her dwarf, Noémi sprang towards me like a tigress, seized my yellak, for I wore the Albanian costume, and said to me, her eyes blazing with anger:

"If you try to go away, and leave us here, we will set

the palace on fire, and, holding you in our arms, we will all be burned together."

The majority of the rebels seemed to be delighted with such an idea, for they screamed out louder than ever:

"Yes, yes, let us take the good Frank in our arms, and all perish with him in the flames of his palace."

I observed a trait that was worthy of La Bruyère. The gentle Anathasia was one of the most ferocious of the incendiary party.

Although this threatened mode of death was worthy of Sardanapalus, I preferred to live as I was, and being now quite convinced that I was adored by my household, I told them that I renounced my projects of departure.

My modesty forbids me saying with what effusion, what transports of joy, my decision was welcomed by those good girls.

The whole twelve of them took hold of each other's hands, and formed a circle. Noémi, as the antique theorist, improvised these simple words, which her companions repeated to the air of their national hymn, "The Swallows."

"At Khios we remain,
Dance, sisters, dance,
At Khios we remain,
We stay with the good Frank.

"He never beats us, he treats us well,
Dance, sisters, dance,
We will always have beautiful fezzes,
Beautiful embroidered yellaks,
Beautiful silk sashes.

"We will eat tender roasted kids,
Fat partridges and quails,
Honey from Hymettus, wine from Scyros.
Dance, sisters, dance,
The good Frank lets us stay.

"Dance, sisters, dance,
We till the soil no more,
No more we mend the roads,
Dance, sisters, dance.

"We will bathe beneath the sycamores,
We will not work at all,
Only pluck fruit and flowers for him,
The good Frank who keeps us."

If I had been blinded by any conceit, I should have had my self-respect somewhat wounded on learning that the roast kid, fat partridges, Scyros wine, beautiful clothes, and idleness, were prominent features in the intense affection these simple creatures bore me.

But, fortunately, I am wiser than that, and can see through their devotion. Formerly I had some doubts as to my powers of attraction, but now, how can I help believing in the charm with which I was invested if it can attach these slaves to me so devotedly?

My charms are easily understood, they are the fat partridges, the roasted kids, the golden belts, and embroidered yellaks.

Oh, happy future! As long as there are any embroiderers and silk weavers in the Isle of Khios, I will be sure of admiration.

I, who until now could never believe in disinterested affection, am obliged to have blind faith in the love I inspire.

It is surely easy to believe these truthful creatures, when they tell me that they love to be elegantly clothed, well fed, and not beaten. I cannot accuse them of duplicity when they say that they like to do nothing harder than pick fruit and flowers, or bathe in the marble pool, in the shade of the plane-trees.

In order to create doubt in my mind, they would have to tell me that they preferred to give up an indolent life

for one of hardship, to abandon the sensual life they live here, and return to their household avocations.

Have they ever told me that it would be a joy to them to go back to their homes, and till the soil, or mend the roads? — manly occupations that the women of Albania perform admirably.

No, they have energetically declared their willingness to be burnt alive with me in my palace, at the first proposal I made them to give up silk for homespun, the *far-niente* of idleness for hard work, a life of pleasure for household duties.

They have innocently expressed their preference for remaining with the good Frank, and I believe them. When we consider their reasons for staying here, how can we doubt their truth?

This time selfish motives are so apparent, that I shall have no occasion to torment myself with doubts.

But what do I hear? It is a salute from a ship, the sound of a cannon!

What does it mean?

CHAPTER IX.

RECOGNITION.

THERE is nothing very remarkable about the incident I am about to relate, but I am very curious and excited.

A Russian frigate has just come in from Constantinople; fearing bad weather, she has put into Khios, instead of going on to Smyrna, or the Oulach Islands.

That frigate fired a cannon-shot for a pilot, and that was the salute I heard this morning.

Who is that lady who, in spite of the high wind, came on shore as soon as the vessel was anchored? The sight of that simple little blue bonnet, the cashmere shawl drawn snugly over the shoulders, that little foot so well shod, that little hand so well gloved, has operated a retrograde movement in regard to my ideas of beauty.

From the antique Greek I have passed to the Parisian type. I would now give all the Noémis, the Anathasias, and the Daphnés in the world, with all their fezzes, their yellaks, and embroidered belts, to be able to offer my arm to that pretty stranger; for she is pretty, I could see that much from the trellis of my kiosk. She is tall and slender, and has beautiful blue eyes, which is something very charming in a fair-skinned brunette.

The gentleman whose arm she leans on is middle-aged, and has a fine, intelligent face.

Who can these strangers be?

KHIOS, October, 18—.

What a strange meeting! Events are so strange that it is well worth while to continue my journal.

Yesterday I sent my old Cypriote to find a Calabrian, who fills the position of port-warden, and attends to the Marquis Justiniani's business, and ask him who were the travellers on the frigate.

That ship is commanded by the Duke of Fersen, ex-ambassador of Russia to the Sublime Porte; he is on his way to Toulon, with the princess, his wife, and several distinguished persons. It was Madame de Fersen that I saw yesterday on the landing.

This morning, about one o'clock, I was lazily stretched on my divan, smoking my Turkish pipe, whose bowl Noémi held, while Anathasia was burning some perfumes in a silver pan, when the curtains of my apartments were suddenly thrust aside, and Daphné entered triumphantly, leading a party of strangers, among whom were M. and Madame de Fersen.

I could have strangled Daphné, for I was furious to be caught in my Oriental costume.

My hair and beard had grown quite long, and my neck was bare. I wore the long, white skirt of the Albanians, a cherry-coloured jacket embroidered with orange silk, red morocco gaiters, embroidered with silver, and an orange-coloured sash.

It was probably very picturesque, but it seemed terribly ridiculous, and so like a masquerade, that I grew red with shame, as a young lady might do if she were caught playing with a doll. (The comparison is silly, but it expresses how I felt.)

Hoping to be mistaken for a real Albanian, I remained very serious, to complete the deception.

The prince, accompanied by his Greek interpreter, stepped forward and excused himself for his indiscretion, asking me to pardon his wife's curiosity, but that she had found the palace so beautiful, and the gardens so

enchanting, that she asked permission to visit them, while the ship waited for a favourable wind.

I replied by a low bow, putting my left hand on my breast, and my right hand on my forehead, as the Albanians do; then I bowed my head to the princess, without getting up from the divan.

I was about to say a few polite words to the interpreter, when I heard a shrill voice, and at the same time I saw, — whom do you suppose? — Du Pluvier!

I was stunned.

It was he, as ridiculous as ever, decked out in gold chains and an embroidered waistcoat, noisy, talkative, and never still for a moment. The little man was redder and fatter than ever. He was evidently a member of the French legation at Constantinople, for he wore a blue coat with buttons bearing the king's initials.

That infernal bore held one of my dwarfs by the ear, and, showing him to Madame de Fersen, said, "Here, madame, is one of the monsters of the Middle Ages."

Then, on a sign from the prince that the master of the house was present, Du Pluvier turned around, and looked at me.

I trembled, for I knew that he recognised me.

It would be impossible to depict Du Pluvier's astonishment; his eyes rolled in his head, he stretched forward his arms, and, stepping towards me, cried out:

"What! are you here, my dear Arthur? You! disguised as a Mamamouchi! This is a strange meeting! Why, I have not seen you since the first representation of 'The Comte d'Ory' at the Opéra. You were there with Madame de Pënâfiel."

The prince, his wife, the interpreter, and some Russian officers who accompanied the ambassador, all of whom understood French perfectly well, were quite as much surprised as Du Pluvier. Madame de Fersen looked at me curiously, but could not refrain from smiling.

I bit my lips, cursing my costume, Daphné, and, above

all, Du Pluvier, whom I wished the devil might take. He kept on with his protestations of friendship, while all eyes were fixed on us.

I had either to stick to my rôle of Albanian, and let Du Pluvier pass for a fool, or to admit my foolish disguisement.

I bravely chose the latter course.

I rose, and went respectfully to bow to Madame de Fersen, and beg her pardon for having for an instant deceived her. I frankly admitted that, caught in the act of playing the Oriental, I had preferred to be taken for an Albanian, than for a silly Frenchman.

She received my excuses with charming grace, which was, however, a little sarcastic, when she expressed her astonishment at finding a man of the world under the garb of an Oriental.

It is useless to say that Madame de Fersen speaks French like a Russian, that is to say, perfectly.

CHAPTER X.

COMPARISONS.

KHIOS, October, 18—.

I HAVE again adopted the European costume, which I had so indolently cast aside, and have been on board of the *Alexina*, to pay a visit to M. and Madame de Fersen.

Madame de Fersen is not so young as I at first thought her to be. She must be about thirty or thirty-three.

Her hair is very black, her eyes very blue, her complexion is fair, and her hands and feet are beautiful. She has an expressive face, and seems witty, though not malicious. What appears to be her predominant trait, is to discuss, understandingly, European politics.

I cannot say how far her pretensions on this subject are justified, for I am quite ignorant of all these questions. I stated this fact to Madame de Fersen, who laughed at me, and evidently did not believe a word that I said.

M. de Fersen is a very intelligent, agreeable, and cultivated man. By way of relaxation, and as a change from his diplomatic duties, he has given himself up to the study of light French literature, which taste he shares with the dean of European diplomats, Prince Metternich.

I was astonished at M. de Fersen's memory, when he quoted, with the fidelity of a catalogue, the titles of long-forgotten vaudevilles, and recited passages from them; for he also delighted in acting comedy.

Unfortunately, I am as little versed in vaudevilles as

in politics, and could therefore not fully appreciate M. de Fersen's learning in this specialty.

The prince only expressed one wish: it was to get to Paris as soon as possible, in order to see the great actors of the minor theatres, who were at once his heroes and his rivals.

M. and Madame de Fersen are exceptionally well bred, and seem to have been born to fill the high position they hold in society.

To much native dignity, they unite that charming affability and cordiality that are often found in distinguished members of the Russian aristocracy; for in such alone can we now find the sprightly elegance of the *Ancien Régime.*

I went on board the frigate to-day, and spent a delightful evening.

There were only five of us: Madame de Fersen and her husband, the captain of the *Alexina*, a distinguished young officer, Du Pluvier, and I.

Du Pluvier had been attaché to the French legation in Constantinople, but had soon become tired of his duties there, and had asked to be recalled. He had profited by the visit of the Russian frigate to return to Toulon.

It is so long since I have seen anything of society, that my visit had all the attraction of novelty.

I made quite a study of Madame de Fersen, who sketched for me several portraits, among them that of the British minister at Constantinople, with a wit and power of description quite remarkable.

I have never met the honourable Sir ——, but his portrait is now for ever imprinted on my memory.

I have always supposed that nothing could be more insupportable than a woman who liked to talk politics. I have almost changed my mind since listening to Madame de Fersen.

There is nothing vague or nebulous about her way of talking; she sometimes explains events of serious importance by the human passions that give rise to them, and by showing what private interests they conflict with; thus going from effect to cause, from the infinitely great to the infinitely small, she reaches very piquant and unexpected conclusions.

Her theories suit me so well that I undoubtedly look on them with great partiality; however, I think that I am safe in claiming for Madame de Fersen a distinguished position among eminently clever women.

The prince having been entrusted with numerous missions to the different European powers, his wife had naturally been intimately acquainted with the most distinguished persons of each nation; nothing could be more amusing than her conversation, as she passed in review these well-known personages, and told the wittiest things about them.

Her dress was beautiful, and I was quite sure it was French, for such toilets can only come from Paris.

It was with real delight that I noticed the long tresses of her black hair, half hidden under a blonde lace barbe, in which she had fastened a spray of geranium blossoms. She wore a robe of white India muslin, adorably fresh and delicate, and her little feet were encased in black satin slippers.

It was all so fresh and simple and new to me, that the bright coloured yellaks and embroidered fezzes of the Grecian girls seemed horribly crude and vulgar, and their gold and silver made me think of the tinsel dresses of rope-dancers.

I know not whether to rejoice or be alarmed at what has happened.

I have been seized with a sudden disgust at the life I have been leading here for the last year.

When I compare my gross pleasures and solitary rev-

eries to the conversation I have just had with that young, beautiful, and intelligent woman, to such an exchanging of pleasant and clever thoughts, to the necessity of disguising whatever would be a shock to refined feelings; when I compare my indolent life of a satrap, who gives orders and is obeyed, to the charming necessity of pleasing, to that choice language and manner that a woman like Madame de Fersen imposes on you, even though you are but a mere acquaintance.

When I compare the present with the past, I am astonished that I could have lived so long in such a way.

I have, however, lived for eighteen happy months at Khios. If the future shows itself under a more seductive form, I must not condemn the happy days that I may live to regret.

I am terribly perplexed. What shall I do?

If I remain here regretfully, if my future life in Khios becomes wearisome, it were better to leave the island at once. M. de Fersen has kindly invited me to go with him back to France.

I know not what to do. I must wait; besides, Du Pluvier is to breakfast with me to-morrow. I will make him talk about Madame de Fersen.

CHAPTER XI.

THE DEPARTURE.

On Board the Frigate Alexina.
October, 18—.

It is all over. I have left the island.

Yesterday morning Du Pluvier came to breakfast with me.

He seemed singularly preoccupied.

"My friend," said he, "you live here the life of a veritable pasha, — a sybarite, a true odalisk. On my word of honour, it is charming; neither I nor the princess can understand it."

"How so?"

"*Parbleu!* She and the prince make wild suppositions as to the reasons which prompted you to lead such a life. The princess particularly seems puzzled; but as I know nothing, I can tell her nothing."

"My dear Du Pluvier, tell me, have you seen much of M. and Madame de Fersen during your sojourn in Constantinople?"

"Very often, nearly every day; the Russian embassy was one of the most agreeable houses of the Christian quarter. Little comedies were given there twice a week, and my duties prevented my skipping a single rehearsal."

"Your duties?"

"Yes, I was under-prompter, — our first secretary was naturally prompter-in-chief."

"Oh, without doubt. But what was said of Madame de Fersen at Constantinople?"

"A proud woman, — a second Joan d'Arc. She ruled the embassy with a rod of steel, — she did everything. They say she even carried on a direct correspondence with the Czar, and during that time the excellent prince was acting one of Potier's rôles. In such a capacity he is perfection personified! I have seen him act 'Les Frères Féroces,' and thought I should die with laughter!"

"And did Madame de Fersen also act?"

"Not a bit of it; she had other things to do, *ma foi!* Believe me or not, just as you wish, but I have never heard a single evil word said against her."

"No doubt she was entirely taken up with politics?"

"She thought of nothing else; which fact did not prevent her from being gay and agreeable, as you noticed, no doubt. But as to her heart, — it is a protocol lacking a signature."

"Always witty," said I to Du Pluvier, who was laughing at his own joke. "But what makes you think Madame de Fersen so cold-hearted?"

"*Parbleu!* the complaints of those whom she has repulsed; firstly, Villeblanche, our first secretary, the prompter-in-chief. You remember Villeblanche? Well, he wasted his time like all the others, and if any one could have succeeded, most assuredly that man was Villeblanche."

"Who is Villeblanche?"

"Villeblanche is — well, just Villeblanche, *le beau* Villeblanche — *Parbleu!* of course you know Villeblanche, you know him well."

"But I don't know him at all, I tell you."

"Is it possible you are not acquainted with *le beau* Villeblanche? The soul of our diplomatic corps! A fellow of many resources, to whom the foreign office owes the invention of double seals called 'à la Villeblanche.' How does it happen that you have never met him?"

"It is a great pity, but some persons are very ignorant."

"It was at the Congress of Verona that Villeblanche's diplomatic career was assured, for then it was that he rendered the government such a service as only he could render."

"But I thought that France's greatest man, who was entrusted to represent her at that congress, was the only one to whom the treaty was due?"

"Who? Châteaubriand?"

"Yes, Châteaubriand."

"I do not wish to lessen his glory, but if it was he who did the thinking, it was Villeblanche who accomplished the work, and Châteaubriand, with all his genius, could never have done what Villeblanche did; after all, one should judge according to actions, not according to words."

"Besides which?"

"In truth, I cannot understand how it happens that you do not know. It is universal, it is European! Well, know then that, during the congress, Villeblanche, entrusted with the most important despatches, travelled first from Verona to Paris, from Paris to Madrid, where he stayed one hour; then from Madrid he came back to Paris, and left there immediately for St. Petersburg. Nor is this all. From St. Petersburg he returned to Verona, and left there like a flash of lightning for Madrid by way of Paris. This is a mere nothing. From Madrid he again returned to Verona by way of Paris, and finally he returned to Paris, passing through Vienna and Berlin on his way. How is that, my friend?"

"But your diplomat's book of services must be a regular posting book," said I.

"And to think," said Du Pluvier, with admiration, "to think that Villeblanche has never stopped in any European capital except just the time that was necessary to deliver and receive his despatches, — and yet, whenever he got down from his carriage he was charming, as well

dressed as though he had just been taken out of a box! That is what not one of his colleagues can ever understand," added Du Pluvier, with a mysterious air. "For two months to live in a travelling carriage without getting out of one's harness, — it is wearisome, fatiguing to the last degree, while this devilish Villeblanche always managed to look fresh as a rose. It is stupefying! Besides, it has made him no end of enemies, jealous, perhaps, for they now talk of sending him as minister to some German court."

"I am quite of your opinion; Châteaubriand, with all his genius, could never have done all that, but, fortunately for our diplomacy, there are numerous Villeblanches. By the way, how could Madame de Fersen remain insensible to such merits? She was doubtless afraid that, from mere habit, the handsome diplomat would ask her to go too far!"

I only permitted myself this piece of pleasantry out of a feeling of hospitality, and I was rewarded for the sacrifice by hearing Du Pluvier break out in such a fit of laughing that the dogs barked and the parrots began their screaming.

When all was quiet again, he continued, "Yes, my dear Arthur, Madame de Fersen resisted Villeblanche and all the fine flowers of foreign diplomacy in Constantinople. That is sufficient, is it not, alas! to show that her virtue is not to be corrupted?" he added, with a deep sigh.

"Wherefore such a sigh?"

"It is because Madame de Fersen's virtue is like all the other colossal virtues that I have been shipwrecked on since ever I came into the world. It is frightful to think how virtuous women can be!" said Du Pluvier, in a very discouraged way. "And yet, to hear some fellows talk, you would suppose one only had to choose."

"Admitting," said I to Du Pluvier, to console him a

little, — "admitting that those fellows are not liars, but simply indiscreet, is it not better to do like you, and inspire a woman with an exalted idea of her duty, to make her fond of her husband, no matter how ugly or disagreeable he may be, than to inspire her with the guilty desire of disturbing the peace of her family? For, my dear friend, your rôle is much superior to that of a seducer, it being so much more difficult to do good than to do evil."

"You are quite right; I tell myself so frequently," said Du Pluvier; "it is much more moral, but I swear it becomes tiresome at last. I entered the diplomatic corps in order to be successful in society. Well, it has done nothing of the kind."

"I have felt just the same way, seeing, with horror, that people were growing more and more high-principled; and wishing to respect social laws, I sought a more primitive place, and established myself here, where certain principles and social laws are no more spoken of than in Otähiti."

"That is what I thought," said Du Pluvier, with a meditative air. "Since seeing you so well established, I have had an idea. I said to myself, 'What am I to do in the future? If I return to Paris, I certainly will not find things any more amusing than formerly. I am as free as air. There is that dear Arthur, living all alone on his island like Robinson Crusoe. A companion is always agreeable, even necessary, for one might fall ill. Very well, then, as I am so fond of this dear Arthur, let me show my friendship for him. If he is Robinson, let me become his Friday. Stay with him six months, — a year, — ten years, — or as long as he remains on his island, and live there, *pardieu!* like a pair of sultans.' There, my friend, these are the results of my last night's reflections. What do you think of them? You see the night brings counsel. I will become your Friday!"

I was terrified, for I had never dreamed of such a thing as this.

I said nothing, though, for fear of making things worse by contradicting him. I pretended at first to be charmed with his plan, then I began to throw every kind of difficulty in his way.

I spoke of a threatened raid by the Turks, — he feared nothing, for he knew I was brave as a lion.

I exaggerated the expenses of my establishment that he wished to share, — he had just come into a large inheritance from an uncle at Saintonge.

He pressed me so hard that I had to avow my passion for solitude, saying that it had now become a perfect monomania, and that sometimes, for whole weeks and months, I could scarcely endure the sight of any one, — he said he would vanish like a sprite (what a sprite!) until my fit of loneliness was over.

At last, as a final argument, I said it would be impossible for me, from certain reasons, to give him a lodging in the Carina Palace, — he said he could easily find some villa in the neighbourhood, having decided to live in Turkish fashion, and never to leave me.

The situation was becoming extremely serious.

Du Pluvier, like all obstinate and narrow-minded persons, might persist in doing as he said, and then my sojourn on the island would be unbearable.

This thought, added to the singular revulsion of feeling that Madame de Fersen had produced in me, made me seriously think of abandoning Khios.

Perhaps, had it not been for this strange caprice of Du Pluvier's, I might have hesitated to take this step. Perhaps I might have struggled against this desire of reëntering society.

But, placed between the alternatives of returning to France with Madame de Fersen, who was charming, or of remaining in Khios with my slaves, that were beginning to be hateful to me, and sharing my solitude

with Du Pluvier, I had no hesitation in leaving the island.

I have always come to grave decisions with promptness.

As Du Pluvier continued to insist, I told him that I had not yet given him my real reason for declining his offer, but that, since he forced me to it, I must tell him that I was obliged to return to France.

"Leave your beautiful palace,— those adorable women, — that light your pipe, and pour out your wine, — who dance for you as though you were at the Opéra, — real houris! It is impossible!"

"Unfortunately, my dear Du Pluvier, there are some confessions that are hard to make even to a friend, but to tell the truth, I have sustained losses, and my diminished fortune obliges me to return to France, and live less like a sultan."

"Really, really, my dear count," said Du Pluvier, who seemed sincerely grieved, "you can't tell how sad that makes me. But what are you going to do with all this establishment?"

"I am going to free the women, the birds, the dogs, and the dwarfs, pay an indemnity to the Marquis Justiniani, and sell all the furniture in Khios."

"You have decided to do that?"

"Quite decided."

"Positively?"

"Yes, yes, yes, — a hundred times yes."

"Then, my dear Arthur, you will not reproach me if I profit by your decision?"

"How can that be? What do you mean?"

"This is my scheme. The life you are living in this earthly paradise has turned my head. Will you sell me all of these treasures, — palace, women, dogs, dwarfs, and parrots?"

I thought that he was joking, and looked at him incredulously.

"Is it a bargain? You will lose less than in selling everything piecemeal," said he, with a resolute air. "But what do you ask for the slaves and the furniture?"

"It is useless for you to ask the price of the slaves, for I will only leave them with you on condition that when you leave the island you will set them free."

"But how do you expect to get back to France?"

"I shall ask M. de Fersen to allow me to take your place on the frigate."

"But the ship is to sail to-day."

"What difference does that make? If you are quite decided, I can leave to-day."

"I am perfectly decided. Shake hands, my dear Arthur; I only need the time it will take me to go on board and get my baggage."

"Then it is agreed."

And Du Pluvier left me.

This sudden resolution of his did not greatly astonish me. Du Pluvier was one of those essentially imitative natures, who, never having any ideas of their own, are always ready to appropriate those of others, and disport in them, whether suitable or not. Like those persons who wear a costume without stopping to see if it fits them, Du Pluvier had doubtless been struck by the eccentricity of my existence, and thought himself very original in adopting it.

No doubt the passengers on the frigate had spoken of my strange conduct, and had either praised, blamed, or exaggerated the singular disposition of a man of the world that could bring him to desire to lead such a life; but, as they probably had, in spite of blame or praise, thought it was quite out of the ordinary course, Du Pluvier thought he would distinguish himself from the vulgar by taking my place. Perhaps the idea of such a sensual life was seductive.

THE DEPARTURE.

I got ready to leave the island. For a moment I admit that I was vaguely sad; I was leaving the certain for the uncertain. This material existence that I was beginning to despise had its disenchantments; but nothing is perfect in this world. The most ideal and spiritualised life, is it not also sometimes a disappointment?

But how could I hesitate when I thought of living with Du Pluvier?

Before leaving, I wished to assure myself of the future welfare of my slaves. I sent for them, and presented them each with eight hundred francs, which was a considerable sum for them; but they received it with perfect indifference.

Then I sent for the renegade of Khios, who attended to the affairs of the Marquis Justiniani, and told him that I left Du Pluvier in my stead as tenant of the palace and master of the slaves. I warned him to say no word about it until the frigate had weighed anchor.

Du Pluvier returned in ecstasy. He begged me to leave him my Albanian costumes, as he wished to install himself immediately, and had not time to buy himself a costume.

I consented and even helped him to dress. He was perfectly ridiculous thus rigged up.

He asked me, then, to present him to the slave girls as their future master.

I took care to do nothing of the kind, being conceited enough to believe that there would be another revolt among the good creatures, if they thought I was about to abandon them.

I told them, on the contrary, that I was going again on board the ship as I had several times gone before, and that they must try and amuse my friend during my absence.

Noémi looked at Du Pluvier with a deceitful smile, Daphné looked disgusted, and Anathasia began to pout.

Having my misgivings on the future harmony in which the girls were to live with Du Pluvier, I shook his hand, and, quite overcome by my feelings, left the palace.

The ship's boat was waiting at the wharf, and I was soon on board.

M. de Fersen was very gracious and obliging to me, and the Russian captain granted me my passage with the greatest hospitality.

Two hours after leaving the palace we were under way.

Du Pluvier's decision was the subject of our pleasantries for quite a long time.

After tacking a few times, we arrived opposite the Carina Palace, which was half-way up the hillside; a portion of the park extended down to the waterside.

With a field-glass I gazed sadly on this beautiful spot, that I was about to leave for ever, when a strange sight attracted my attention.

No doubt the renegade had told of my departure, and they had seen the frigate sailing away, for I saw the slaves rush suddenly down the bank, and over the lawn, and assemble on the beach, where they stretched out their arms towards the frigate in attitudes of despair.

Then, seeing that the ship was going farther and farther away, Noémi tore off her fez in a rage, threw it on the ground, and stamped on it with both feet; soon her thick black hair was flying in the wind. She looked like a beautiful fury.

Daphné, who perhaps had not yet given up all hope, waved her silken scarf by way of a signal.

Anathasia, the blonde, was kneeling on the beach.

Soon I beheld Du Pluvier, very much at his ease in

my Albanian costume, rush down to the beach, followed by the old Cypriote and the two dwarfs, who were indulging in a thousand capers.

Doubtless the new sultan was inviting his odalisks to return to their seraglio.

But unfortunately the odalisks were not very obedient, and the sultan was not very persuasive, for after some exchange of words, with the old Cypriote as an interpreter, all the women fell like so many furies on Du Pluvier, who was lost to sight amid their raised and threatening arms.

I never saw the end of this entertaining sight, for the vessel rounded a promontory which completely hid the palace from our sight.

Half an hour afterwards the captain said to me:

"I would like to know the meaning of that thick smoke that is going up from the upper part of Khios, in the direction of the villa you lived in."

Noémi's threat to burn the palace if I abandoned her flashed through my mind.

Had these furious maidens carried her project to its execution? What had become of Du Pluvier? Had he perished in the flames entwined in the arms of his slaves? I could not answer the question, and we very soon were out of sight of the island, and in a terrible state of anxiety as to the fate of poor Du Pluvier.

THE PRINCESSE DE FERSEN

CHAPTER XII.

THE ALEXINA.

Such were the impressions left upon me by a year's sojourn in the island of Khios, such the motives of my abrupt departure for France on board the Russian frigate *Alexina*.

Having introduced in its proper place this fragment of my journal of former days, I resume my narrative.

I find myself in a state of mind eminently suitable to take up this narrative and follow up the incidents, be they gay or sad, pathetic or tragic.

The last and violent emotions that I have felt since my journey to the East, up to this moment when I am writing these lines, have so worn out my heart, I find myself so indifferent to the future and the past, that I can relate this new episode of my life with the most profound detachment, as if it in no way concerned me.

The reading of these pages, dated from the island of Khios, and written in the East three years ago, has still further increased my indifference to all that relates to myself.

When I once again return to calmness and reason, I find myself so unquiet, so restless, so frenzied, so little made for the happiness which fate seemed to bestow on me (perhaps for the very reason that I never would profit by it), that I judge myself with an extreme and perhaps unjust severity.

From the point of view in which I have placed myself, having but little self-esteem, being prejudiced against

myself, deficient in pride and self-conceit, I exaggerate still more my defects, and the absence of vanity in my character often prevents my esteeming at their full value some truly generous actions of which I might be justly proud.

Hence, I believe if these pages were ever made known (which never can happen, as I shall take good care to prevent it), they would give a very poor opinion of my character.

And yet, would many have acted as I have?

If formerly I attributed to Hélène the most hateful duplicity, have I not in my despair attempted everything, done everything, to repair my fault? Had she been willing to accept my hand, would I not have given up to her my fortune? And later, when I became aware that Frank was poor, did I not come to his assistance as delicately as I could?

If I have been unjustly cruel towards Marguerite, at least I had for a long time courageously defended her against the calumnies of the world, even before I was known to her.

And that duel,— that fierce duel of which she has ever been ignorant?[1]

If, led astray by an attack of incurable frenzy, I outrageously insulted Falmouth, had I not saved his life at the risk of mine?

The good I have done certainly does not acquit me of the evil imputed to me, but is it not dreadful to think that all that was worthy and noble in my conduct will ever vanish under the flood of bitterness and hate to which my distrust gave birth?

But after all, what matter is the past now to me!

[1] Here some lines were erased in the "Journal of an Unknown." The narrative of this duel not being found in the episode of Madame de Pénâfiel, and Arthur again alluding to it at the time of the pirate's fight against the yacht, it is probable that this omission was the result of an involuntary or premeditated forgetfulness. — *Note by the Author, E. S.*

THE ALEXINA.

These lines are written that I may once more see the events of my life roll by before my eyes; that they may shorten the long and weary hours of solitude in which I live at present at Serval, in the old and gloomy ancestral castle so long abandoned by me.

We therefore left the island of Khios in perfect ignorance as to the fate of Du Pluvier.

Although we entered the equinox, the crossing was fine, though frequently delayed by contrary winds.

The Russian sailors appeared to me quite different from the English. These are submissive to the hardships of the most despotic military discipline; they are, by nature and custom, full of deference for the officers belonging to the highest aristocracy, officers of whom they are above all proud, just as negroes pride themselves in belonging to a white master rather than to a mulatto. Everything in them, however, reveals that unconquerable national pride, that insolent British arrogance, which renders the English sailor one of the best sailors in the world, because he is always driven or sustained by an exaggerated sentiment of his own value, and by his profound faith in the superiority of his own country over all other maritime nations.

Now, however deluded they may be, fanaticism and faith always work prodigies.

The Russian sailors, on the contrary, displayed a passive, almost religious, obedience, a blind resignation, a mechanical submission to the will of their superiors, in whom they almost appeared to acknowledge a nature superior to their own. One felt, indeed, that a word, a sign, from these officers might elevate the resignation and intrepid devotion of the Russian sailors, even to the heroism of personal self-sacrifice.

Strange difference between the character of these two people and that of the French, — of the French, sometimes strictly obedient, but never respectful, gaily obey-

ing superiors, of whom they make fun, or bravely dying for causes which they revile!

I was led to these various reflections by observing the calm customs, almost cloister-like, prevailing on board the Russian frigate, which, after a few days, caused a very strange reaction upon us passengers.

Nothing, in fact, was more singular than the appearance of this vessel; it was silence amidst the solitude of the waters. Except the orders of the officers, not a word was ever heard. Mute and attentive, the crew answered to the orders of the officers only by the noise of the manœuvres, which were executed with mechanical precision.

At sundown, the chaplain read prayers, all the sailors humbly kneeling, after which they descended into the forecastle.

But everywhere and always, an inexorable silence. If they were whipped for some fault, never a cry; if they rested from their labours, never a song.

The captain and his lieutenant, at whose table M. and Madame Fersen, as well as I, sat, were well bred men, and excellent sailors, but their minds were not remarkably cultivated.

M. de Fersen read almost incessantly from a collection of French dramatic works.

Madame de Fersen and I, therefore, were left almost isolated in the midst of this little colony; neither men, things, nor events could distract us from our individual preoccupations.

In the midst of this profound calm, this seclusion, this silence, the slightest fancies became firmly impressed on the frame of so simple a life; in a word, if one may so express it, never was canvas more evenly prepared to receive the impressions of the painter, however varied, however eccentric, they might be.

At noon we assembled for breakfast, followed by a walk on deck; then M. de Fersen returned to the

reading of his beloved plays, and the officers to their nautical observations.

Madame de Fersen usually occupied the saloon of the frigate; thus every day I chatted with her with scarcely any interruption from two o'clock until the approach of the dinner-hour caused her to withdraw and make a fresh, and always charming, toilet.

After dinner, when the weather permitted, coffee was served on deck. Once more we took a walk, and about nine o'clock we again assembled in the saloon.

Madame de Fersen was an excellent musician, and would often seat herself at the piano, to the great delight of the prince, who then begged her to accompany him in some vaudeville airs, which he sang remarkably well. At other times, one of the officers of the frigate, who had a pleasant voice, sang some quaint and very agreeable Russian songs.

With music and conversation, in which M. de Fersen took an active part, and which he enlivened with sparkling and refined gaiety, the evening passed agreeably until eleven o'clock, at which hour tea was served, after which each one retired as he felt disposed.

It may be seen that, apart from the limit of the walks, we led the life of a château, the most intimate and the most secluded.

On the third day after our departure from Khios, an incident occurred, very slight, apparently, but which had, which was bound to have, a very strange influence on my destiny.

Madame de Fersen had a little daughter called Irene, towards whom she displayed a fondness almost approaching idolatry. It was impossible to dream of anything more perfect, more ideal, than this child.

She was of a severe and stately beauty. Many mothers would have preferred for their daughters a more childish and smiling face. I must acknowledge I myself could not avoid, at times, a feeling of sadness, while gazing on

this adorable countenance, expressive of an indefinable melancholy, incomprehensible at so tender an age.

Irene's brow was broad, her complexion bore a healthy pallor, and her rounded cheeks denoted robust health. Her dark brown hair, very abundant, fine, and silky, curled naturally about her neck; her large eyes, of a liquid and velvety black, had a remarkably deep look, more especially when, with that faculty natural to children, she would gaze at you fixedly, without lowering the dark fringes of her eyelids. Her nose was slender and beautiful, her mouth small and coral red, and her lower lip slightly pouting and disdainful, if disdain had not seemed incompatible with her youth. Her form, her hands, and her feet were of a rare perfection.

Irene, by a touching superstition of her mother's, after a long illness, had been dedicated to wear only white; the almost religious simplicity of this garb gave marked individuality to her appearance.

As I have already stated, it was the third day of our departure from Khios.

Irene, who until then had appeared to observe me with a kind of restless mistrust, and who by degrees had become more friendly, came resolutely towards me and said, with childish solemnity:

"Look at me, that I may see whether I am going to love you."

Then after having fixed upon me one of those long, piercing glances of which I have spoken, and which compelled me to lower my eyes, Irene continued:

"Yes, I shall love you very much." And after a renewed silence, she turned to Madame de Fersen, saying:

"Yes, my dear mother, I shall love him very much. I shall love him as I loved Ivan!"

In saying these words, her childish face assumed such a fascinating expression of gravity that I could not avoid smiling.

But my astonishment was great when I saw Madame de Fersen look with amazement, first at Irene, and then at me, as if she attached a great importance to what her little girl had just said to me.

"Although I have nothing now to envy the happy Ivan, this is a declaration, madame, which I much fear will be forgotten ten years hence," said I to the princess.

"Forgotten! Irene forgets nothing. See her tears at the remembrance of Ivan."

In fact two large pearls were rolling down the child's cheeks, while she continued to fix upon me a glance at once sweet, sad, and questioning.

"But who, then, was Ivan?"

Madame de Fersen's features darkened, and she answered me, with a sigh: "Ivan was one of our relatives who died quite young," — she hesitated a moment, — "died a violent and frightful death two years ago. Irene had become so attached to him that I was almost jealous. I can hardly tell you of the incredible grief of this child when she no longer saw Ivan, for whom she asked incessantly. She was then four years old, and so deep was her sorrow that she fell seriously ill, and came nigh unto death. At this time it was that I dedicated her to the wearing of white, and implored God to spare her to me. But what astonishes me exceedingly, is that, for the past two years, you are the only person to whom Irene has said that she would love him."

Irene, who had listened to her mother with all attention, now took my hand, and, with an almost inspired air, she raised to heaven her eyes still wet with tears, and said:

"Yes, I shall love him like Ivan, for soon he will go up there, like Ivan."

"Irene, my child, what are you saying? Ah, pardon her, monsieur!" cried Madame de Fersen, al-

most with terror, looking at me with an imploring glance.

"Were I even to purchase it with the same end as poor Ivan," said I, smiling, "allow me, madame, the enjoyment of so touching an affection."

I am neither weak nor superstitious, but I can hardly describe the strange impression produced upon me by this childish speech which I will explain presently. There is no half-way. Such incidents are either of the utmost absurdity, or they act powerfully on certain minds.

By a happy chance, M. de Fersen came in at this moment to beg his wife to accompany him in a vaudeville song, and thus a strange scene came to an end.

I noticed that Madame de Fersen did not mention to her husband the strange declaration that Irene had made me.

That day, after dinner, the princess complained of a bad headache, and retired to her room.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE PRINCESSE DE FERSEN.

THE next morning Madame de Fersen did not appear at breakfast. She was not well, the prince said, and had spent a restless night. Then, abruptly, to my great astonishment, he spoke to me most freely and confidentially, regarding the character, the mind, the habits of his wife, and the life led by her, perhaps to warn me of the futility of my aspirations, in the event of my having dreamed of paying my court to Madame de Fersen. I can in no other way explain his incomprehensible whim in entering upon such details with me.

The following is the substance of what I learned from M. de Fersen about his wife.

Mlle. Catherine Metriska, daughter of Count Metriska, governor of one of the Asiatic provinces of the Russian Empire, was seventeen years of age when she married M. de Fersen. She possessed a naturally fine mind, and a highly cultivated education developed an intellect precociously mature. At the time of the marriage, the prince was ambassador at Vienna.

At first he feared for the inexperience of his wife, burdened at so early an age with all the responsibilities devolving upon the ambassadress of so great a power at a court so austere, so solemn, and so imposing in its etiquette as the Austrian court. But Madame de Fersen, wonderfully gifted, satisfied every demand of her position, thanks to the exquisite tact, to the delicate shad-

ing, to the perfect balance, she was able to bring in so difficult an intercourse.

"Quite young, full of grace and wit," said the prince, "you may well imagine that Madame de Fersen was at once surrounded by the cream of foreigners arriving at the court of Vienna.

"A husband should no more speak of his wife's virtue, than a man should boast of the nobility of his race," added the prince smiling, "yet I can say I believe, nay, I know, that Cæsar's wife has never been suspected, though Cæsar was fifty years of age. I had married less perhaps for love, though Catherine was charming, than because there are certain embassies which are not entrusted to bachelors, and because in my position I wished to have near me a frank and disinterested person, upon whom I could try the effect of certain combinations, something, save the ferocity of the combination," said the prince, laughing, "as some Roman patricians tried the effect of certain poisons on their slaves. Experience has proved to me that extreme purity was often harder to be deceived than extreme craft, just as children almost always guess intuitively the snares set for them. Hence, when I see Catherine countenancing certain projects, certain ideas, skilfully disguised it is true, in order that her nature, sensitive, delicate, and generous, may not be shocked, I have no fear later in putting forth this idea, that I may irritate the susceptibility of my dear colleagues, whose conscience is usually tolerably tough.

"Little by little," continued the prince, "Madame de Fersen became interested in politics, for, to continue my experiences, I entrusted to her, under various aspects, many of the questions that I must solve. Do not believe, however, that her policy was dry and selfish. No; an exalted love of humanity was her sole impulse. When she spoke of European nations, she spoke as of beloved sisters, not her country's rivals. You may think me in

my dotage in speaking thus seriously of what seems to you, doubtless, the dreams of a young and romantic woman; but, you cannot tell of what service has been to me that turn of mind which makes her so wonderfully enthusiastic for universal peace and happiness. Wisdom consists, does it not, in holding to the middle way at an equal distance from all extremes. When, therefore, I have an important decision to make, the generous and conciliatory policy of Madame de Fersen marks one boundary, while, on the other hand, our traditional selfish and cunning policy gives me the other limit. I may then, without difficulty, choose a wise and prudent middle course between these two extremes.

"I reaped another advantage from this mental tendency of Madame de Fersen: that of being able to affirm that Cæsar's wife has never been suspected, for when the powers of love and devotion in a woman's heart find a brilliant scope through her intelligence, she does not seek other employment for them, more especially when her feminine vanity is flattered by the influence thus acquired.

"Add to this a fact of which I should have spoken earlier, but as one of your most celebrated women, Madame de Sévigné, has said: 'Often the gist of a letter is to be found in its postscript.' Well, without referring to my attachment to my wife and her affection for me, without speaking of the puritanic severity of her principles, do you know what, above all, has preserved her from the indiscretions of youth? Her devoted, her passionate love for her daughter. You could not comprehend its excess, its exaltation. Doubtless, our Irene deserves such devotion, but I sometimes tremble when I reflect that, if an unforeseen disaster like that which has already menaced us should bereave us of that child, her mother would assuredly lose her reason or her life."

M. de Fersen was in the prime of life; he had an almost European reputation as a diplomat. His appear-

ance denoted a distinguished man, called by his superior gifts to the exercise of those high functions which he had always filled; I could not but be astonished at the confidence reposed in one so young and so complete a stranger to him.

As I could not suspect that a man long accustomed to handle public affairs of the most difficult and serious character would act without reflection on matters which interested him personally, I concluded that M. de Fersen's discourse held a hidden purpose, and that it was not without design that he had laid aside the reserve imposed by our age and position.

I repeat, I could see in this eccentric confidence no other aim than to prove to me that Madame de Fersen was unapproachable.

On the other hand, I had been disagreeably impressed when the prince spoke of his wife as of an instrument necessary to his diplomatic career. When he spoke of her, I had detected the most absolute heartlessness, and in his daily intercourse with Madame de Fersen, not only he showed no jealousy, — he was too much a man of the world to become ridiculous, — but he appeared even indifferent.

I asked myself, then, what object he could have in confiding to me that which I have just related.

I was thus plunged in an extreme perplexity.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE TRADITION.

I HAD not seen Madame de Fersen from the time that Irene had made the strange prediction which had seemed to alarm her mother so greatly.

The uncommon affection shown to me by this child astonished me very much. As soon as she was alone, she would come close to me. If I were reading in the saloon, fearing doubtless to be troublesome, she would sit on a cushion, resting her chin on her little hands, and I could not raise my eyes without meeting her profound and solemn glance.

Sometimes I endeavoured to amuse her with childish games, but she appeared disinclined for them, and said to me solemnly with her childish treble: "I prefer staying here near you, and looking at you as I used to look at Ivan."

I was formerly much more superstitious than I am now; but in thinking over the strange fascination I seemed to have for this child, I recalled with a certain heart pang (I must confess the weakness) a singular Sanscrit tradition which my father had often read to me, because, he said, he had witnessed two events which confirmed its text.

According to this tradition, "those predestined to an early and violent death have the gift of fascinating children and lunatics."

Now, in fact, Ivan had fascinated Irene, and he died a violent death.

I also fascinated Irene, who, in total ignorance of the tradition, had predicted for me a violent death.

This uncommon analogy was, to say the least, most extraordinary, and sometimes forcibly preoccupied me.

Even now that time has elapsed since these occurrences, Irene's prediction at times comes back to my mind.

This tradition had been translated by my father, and was written with some other notes in a book containing the description of his travels in England and the East Indies. I had brought this manuscript with me from France, with other papers which were saved from the wreck of the yacht.

The day following the one when the princess was confined to her room by indisposition, she came into the saloon about two o'clock; I was there alone with her child.

Madame de Fersen's face was pale and sad.

She saluted me graciously; her smile seemed to me more than usually friendly.

"I very much fear, monsieur, that my daughter is troublesome," said she, seating herself and taking Irene on her lap.

"It is I, rather, madame, who may be accused of being troublesome, for Irene has shown me several times, by the gravity of her demeanour and speech, that she considered me too much of her age, and not enough of mine."

"Poor child!" said Madame de Fersen, embracing her daughter. "Have you no ill-will towards her, for her strange, her absurd prediction?"

"No, madame, for in turn I shall make a forecast, and then we shall be quits. Mlle. Irene," said I, very seriously, taking her little hand in mine, "I shall not tell you that you will go up there, but I promise that ten or twelve years hence a beautiful angel will

come down here from up there expressly for you. He will be beautiful like you, good like you, charming like you, and will lead you to a gorgeous palace, all marble and gold, where you will live a long, long time, the happiest of the happy with this beautiful angel, for he will love you as you love your mother; and then, one day, this palace being no longer beautiful enough for you, you and your angel together will fly away to go and occupy a more beautiful one up there."

"And will you be there in that palace, with my mamma?" asked the child, fixing her large, inquiring eyes by turns on Madame de Fersen and on me.

It was folly, but I could not help feeling delighted at the association made by Irene in speaking of her mother and of me.

I know not whether Madame de Fersen noticed the sentiment, but she blushed, and said to her daughter, doubtless to avoid answering her question:

"Yes, my child, I shall be there, — at least I hope so."

"But will you be there with him?" persisted the child pointing at me with her little finger.

Whether she was annoyed at Irene's strange insistence, or whether she felt embarrassed, Madame de Fersen kissed her tenderly, took her in her arms and pressed her to her heart, saying, "You are a little goose; go to sleep, my pet."

Then with an absent air she looked through the window of the saloon, saying, "It is a lovely day! How calm is the sea!"

"Very calm," said I, with some irritation at seeing the conversation taking another turn.

Irene closed her eyes and seemed about to go to sleep. Her mother, with infinite grace, caught some of her child's curls and drew them across her eyes, saying softly with motherly fondness, "Sleep, my child, now that I have closed your pretty curtains."

In the early phases of love, there are entrancing trifles which give delight to sensitive souls.

It seemed to me delightful to be able to speak to Madame de Fersen in a half whisper, under pretext of not waking the child. There was in this apparently slight shade of difference something tender, mysterious, veiled, which entranced me.

Irene soon closed her eyes.

"How beautiful she is!" I whispered to her mother. "How much happiness may be read in that lovely face!"

Shall I say that I waited almost with anxiety Madame de Fersen's reply, to know whether she also would whisper back to me?

Shall I say that I was happy, oh, so very happy to hear her reply in the same tone?

"May you be a true prophet," she said; "may she be happy!"

"I could not tell her all I could foresee, madame, she would not have understood; but will you permit me to tell you what I would dream for her?"

"Certainly."

"Well, then, madame, let us not speak of the happiness which is assured to her so long as she lives by your side; that would be too easy a prophecy. Let us speak of the moment so cruel to a mother's heart, when she must abandon her idolised child to the care of an unknown family, of an unknown man. Poor mother! she can scarcely believe it. Her daughter, so timid, so retiring, so sensitive a nature, that to her mother alone she spoke without blushing, and with joyous assurance! Her daughter, — whom she has never left by day or by night! Her daughter, — her pride, her care, her solicitude, and her glory! Her daughter, — that angel of grace and candour, whom she alone can understand, whose joys and sorrows, susceptibility and diffidence she alone can divine! She is now in the power of a stranger, one who has ingratiated himself solely by coming daily for two

months under the eyes of her parents to talk to her of conventional trifles, or, perhaps, of the duty that a wife owes her husband. They are now united; and here, madame, I spare you the horribly vulgar and suggestive pageantry with which we lead a young girl to the altar, under the eyes of an unblushing crowd, with great parade, in the glare of daylight, and with the blare of music and of pomp. In Otahiti they act with more modesty, or at least with more reserve. At length, after the ceremony, this man carries off his prey to his home, saying, 'Follow me, wife!' Well, madame, should my predictions be realised, he who before God and before men would have the right to say so harshly to your daughter, 'Wife, follow me!' should rather say to her, in a soft, timid, supplicating voice, 'Come, my betrothed!'"

Madame de Fersen looked at me with astonishment.

"Yes, madame, above all, that man will respect with pious adoration, with religious veneration, the chastely sublime terror of the maiden, torn from her mother's arms, from her virgin couch, to be thrown suddenly in a strange household. That deep and instinctive fear, that sorrowful regret which his wife feels, he will calm by degrees, with charming attention, with simple kindness, which will tame that poor shrinking heart. He will know how to make himself beloved as the best of brothers, in the hope of being some day the happiest of lovers."

"What a pity that that dream is only a charming folly!" said Madame de Fersen, with a sigh.

"Is it not a pity? Confess that nothing would be more adorable than the mysterious phases of such a love, exalted as hope, passionate as desire, and yet legitimate and authorised. The day on which the young wife, after a prolonged courtship, inspired by passion, should confirm by a tender avowal those rights so ardently desired, which her husband would accept solely from her, — that day would be treasured in her heart as an entrancing and enduring memory. When she had thus freely be-

stowed herself she would find later that the gallantry and temptations of the world pale before the memory of that dazzling, ardent happiness ever present to her mind. Such a memory would assuredly protect a woman from all sinful allurements, which could never offer to her the ineffable rapture which she had found in a sacred and legitimate union."

Whilst I was talking, Madame de Fersen regarded me with increasing astonishment. At last she said:

"Do you really hold on marriage views of such excessive delicacy?"

"Assuredly, madame, or at least I borrow them for my prediction from the man who some day shall be so fortunate as to be entrusted with your daughter's happiness. Do you not think that a husband such as I predict for her, handsome, young, well born, intellectual, attractive, who should hold these opinions, do you not think that he would offer the greatest possibilities for durable happiness? I am sure that Mlle. Irene is endowed with all those precious gifts of the soul which can inspire and appreciate such a love."

"Of course, it is but a beautiful dream; but I must repeat that I am greatly astonished that you should have such dreams," she said to me, with a slightly mocking air.

"And why, madame?"

"What! you, monsieur, who came to the Orient to seek the idealisation of material life!"

"It is true," I murmured, gazing at her fixedly; "but I renounced that life from the moment when chance brought to my knowledge, and gave me the opportunity of adoring, an idealisation of its opposites, of intellect, grace, and love."

Madame de Fersen looked at me severely.

I do not know what she was about to say, when her husband entered and asked me if I knew an air called "Anacreon and Polycrates."

Since the day on which the avowal passed my lips, Madame de Fersen seemed carefully to avoid remaining alone with me, although before our travelling companions her manner was unchanged.

Thanks to the singular affection, however, with which I had inspired Irene, the princess found it difficult to carry out her project.

Whether I appeared on deck or in the saloon, the child took me by the hand, and led me to Madame de Fersen, saying:

"Come, I like to see you with my mother."

At first I could hardly refrain from smiling at Madame de Fersen's vexation at being thus forced into a tête-à-tête which she desired to avoid.

But I feared that this vexation of which I was the involuntary cause might make her take a dislike to me, and I tried to repulse Irene's advances. When she insisted, I refused brusquely two or three times.

The poor child said not a word, two great tears trickled down her cheeks, and she went silently and sat down at a distance from me and her mother.

The latter tried to approach her, to console her, but Irene gently repulsed her caresses.

That evening she ate nothing, and her nurse, who passed the night at her bedside, said that she had hardly slept, and had had several fits of silent weeping.

M. de Fersen, who was not aware of the cause of his daughter's trifling ailment, made light of it and attributed it to the child's excessive nervous susceptibility.

But Madame de Fersen gave me a look of irritation.

I understood her.

My avowal, by placing her on her guard, had made her avoid opportunities of being alone with me.

Irene felt considerably aggrieved at this apparent coldness; the princess naturally looked upon me as the primary cause of her daughter's grief, and she loved her with mad devotion.

Madame de Fersen had therefore good cause to dislike me. I resolved to end Irene's unhappiness.

I took advantage of a moment when I was alone with Madame de Fersen to say to her:

"Madame, forgive an insensate avowal. I regret it the more that it has not been alien to the sorrow and suffering of poor little Irene. I pledge you my word that I will never again say a single word which might trouble your maternal joys and thus expose me to forfeit your good graces which I so highly value."

Madame de Fersen gave me her hand, with charming gratitude, and said:

"I believe you, and thank you with all my heart, for you will thus no longer separate me from my daughter!"

CHAPTER XV.

THE ADIEUX.

I SOON regretted having promised Madame de Fersen never to address her a word of gallantry. Since she felt entirely at her ease with me, she appeared to me more and more charming, and each day I became more deeply in love.

Constant to our meetings in the saloon, where we were almost always alone with Irene, our intercourse soon became quite friendly and intimate.

I very skilfully displayed my total ignorance of politics so that they should be entirely banished in our conversations. Having mastered the situation, I succeeded in always bringing back our talks to the thousand subjects relating to tender or passionate sentiments.

Sometimes, as though fearing the tendency of our intercourse, Madame de Fersen insisted on speaking politics. Then I would profess my ignorance, and the princess would wittily accuse me of acting like those lovers who pretend to dislike sport, in order that they may stay at home with the ladies while their husbands go tramping across the fields.

When the tediousness of navigation had given rise to a certain degree of intimacy between me and the officers of the Russian frigate, our conversation often introduced the name of Madame de Fersen, and I was surprised at the profound respect with which they always spoke of her. Calumny, they said, had never attacked her, be

it in Russia, Constantinople, or at the different courts where she had resided.

A reputation of unimpeachable purity has, I believe, an irresistible charm, especially when found in a young, beautiful, and intellectual woman, of an exalted position; for she must be endowed with a powerful moral strength, to disarm envy, or to blunt its darts, and inspire, as did Madame de Fersen, a general sentiment of benevolence and respect.

In comparing my love for Madame de Pënâfiel to what I felt for Madame de Fersen, I appreciated the lofty and alluring charm of this seduction.

Marguerite had, doubtless, been shamefully maligned,—of this I had received indisputable proofs; but, however false may be the rumours that attack the woman you love, they will ever produce a feeling of resentment.

Admitting, even, that you succeed in convincing yourself of the falsehood of the rumour, you then accuse the woman who is its victim of not possessing the wit to assert her virtue.

Hélène's life had been pure, and yet she had been attacked. My attentions to her had alone occasioned those odious rumours, and yet, in my unjust frenzy, I accused her of not having known how to hold herself above suspicion.

Apart from the grace, the beauty, and intellect of Madame de Fersen, what contributed most to the feeling of adoration in me was, I repeat it, her reputation for exalted and calm virtue.

Most men, when they persist in combating the resistance of a woman seriously attached to her duties, are only led on by the love of contention, by the anticipation of a proud victory!

These were not the sentiments that made me persist in my love for Madame de Fersen. It was an unlimited reliance on the purity of her heart, in the nobility of her character; it was the certainty of loving her with all

the chaste delights of the soul, without fear of being deceived by feigned severity or false prudery.

Moreover, I had given myself up to such coarse materialism during my stay at Khios, that I had an inexpressible desire to abandon myself to the exquisite refinement of a pure and lofty sentiment.

Our crossing, delayed by equinoctial winds, and followed by a long quarantine at the Toulon lazaretto, lasted six weeks.

I did not think I had made any progress in the affections of Madame de Fersen, for her manner towards me had become more and more unconstrained and friendly. She had frankly confessed her pleasure at what she was pleased to call my witty discourse, and expressed a hope that during her stay in Paris we should renew as frequently as possible "our conversations of the saloon."

It was evident Madame de Fersen considered me absolutely unimportant. However unpleasant this discovery was to my vanity, such was my love for Catherine, that I only thought of the happiness of seeing her as frequently as possible, and hoped in the sincerity of my affection for her.

At the end of our quarantine we landed at Toulon, and remained some days to visit that port. M. de Fersen proposed to me that we should not yet separate, and continue our journey together as far as Paris.

I accepted.

I sent for my carriage, which I had sent back to Marseilles when we started from Porquerolles, and we left for Paris towards the beginning of November.

M. de Fersen and his wife travelled in one coach; his daughter, with her nurse, in another. As my travelling carriage was of the same description, and could only accommodate two persons, every day, when about to start after breakfast, M. de Fersen would beg me to take his

place in his wife's carriage, while he took his customary siesta in mine.

Irene, who had shown much sorrow at the mere idea of separating from me, always joined us at these times, and our "conversations of the saloon" continued thus up to Paris.

Notwithstanding the promise I had made Madame de Fersen, I determined on the last day of our journey to renew my avowal of love.

Until then I had scrupulously kept my word, because I feared by not doing so I would forfeit the privilege of our tête-à-tête during the journey.

My hope had been to become, at least for Catherine, a daily thought, and to captivate and interest her mind so that little by little she should become keenly sensitive to my presence or my absence.

I believed that I had achieved this end. I loved Madame de Fersen ardently. I had an excessive longing to please her, and except the word "love," which never passed my lips, I put in my attentions to her all the eagerness, all the tenderness, of the most passionate lover.

Without studying my conversation too deeply, I endeavoured to speak to Catherine only on subjects that were new to her.

She knew neither Paris, nor France, nor England, nor Spain, and I was thoroughly acquainted with them all. I tried, therefore, to amuse her with my accounts of these places, and my descriptions of the customs and habits of these nations.

I succeeded almost always, as I could perceive by the serious attention given to my words, and the interested questions they elicited; then, in spite of myself, I showed my happiness and delight in having interested her.

Madame de Fersen had too much tact not to notice the great impression she continued to make upon me, and she seemed grateful to me for my reserve.

Especially, every time that I found the way, without grieving Irene too deeply, to avoid the embarrassments which the child's strange affection for me brought about at every moment, Madame de Fersen would thank me by an enchanting glance.

One of Irene's chief delights was to take one of my hands, and, having placed it between her mother's, she would silently gaze at us.

This slight favour would have been precious to me had it been granted spontaneously by a tender sentiment on the part of Madame de Fersen; but, not wishing to obtain it otherwise, each time that Irene had this caprice I would carry her little fingers up to my lips without giving her a chance to place my hand in her mother's.

The day before reaching Paris, I was resolved to make another attempt at declaring my love, when a strange incident, which should perhaps have encouraged me to take this step, deterred me from it.

I had not yet been able to ascertain whether or no Madame de Fersen was jealous of her daughter's affection for me; sometimes she had spoken of it in a gaily bantering manner, at other times, on the contrary, she had alluded to it with sadness, almost with bitterness.

That day Irene, who occupied a place in her mother's carriage, asked her if I should have a handsome room in Paris.

I hastily answered the child that I would have a house of my own, and would not live with them.

At these words, Irene as usual silently wept.

Madame de Fersen, seeing her tears, exclaimed, with grieved impatience: "*Mon Dieu!* what is the matter with the child? Why does she love you thus? It is hateful!"

"She loves me, perhaps, for the same reason that she loved Ivan," said I.

As Madame de Fersen did not seem to understand my words, I explained to her the meaning which I attached to them, and spoke of the Sanscrit tradition.

Madame de Fersen thought I was joking.

I have already said that this tradition was written by my father in a book full of notes relating to one of his journeys to England.

Fortunately, this manuscript was in my carriage, for quite recently I had sought in it some particulars in order to explain to Madame de Fersen certain customs which in Scotland are handed down from generation to generation.

At one of the relays, I went for the manuscript, and showed it to Madame de Fersen.

The date was so clear, the writing so faded, that Madame de Fersen could not doubt its authenticity.

I shall never forget the tearful look which Madame de Fersen fixed on me as she let the book fall on her lap.

Doubtless she experienced the same strange emotion I felt when I considered Irene's affection for Ivan and his death, with the writing of this extraordinary tradition:

"Those predestined to an early and violent death have the gift of fascinating children and lunatics."

Irene displayed for me the same fondness she had for Ivan. Might not my fate be the same?

To understand, moreover, all the interest felt by Madame de Fersen at this discovery, one should know that I had frequently frankly confessed to her my excessive superstition, and had so greatly impressed her by relating many singular incidents of this character, that the germs of the same weakness had been laid in her mind.

I must confess, I seemed to discover in Madame de Fersen's look, in her emotion, in her agitation, more than friendship, more than the expression of a touching regret.

Wild with hope, a fresh declaration sprang to my

lips; but fortunately I held back, for I would have committed an irreparable mistake.

If Madame de Fersen's sentiments were really tender, would it not have been stupid in me to arouse her vigilance, which, under her imperious will and sense of duty, would have smothered the first vague instinct of love awakening in her heart?

On the contrary, if the interest which Madame de Fersen showed me was simply friendly, my presumption would have covered me with ridicule in her eyes.

The turn soon taken by our conversation led easily to a proposition which I wished to make to Madame de Fersen, as much as a safeguard to her reputation as in the interest of my affection.

We were speaking of Irene.

"Poor child!" said I to her mother, "how can she get accustomed not to see me?"

"But she will retain, I hope for her and for me, this charming intercourse," replied Catherine, "for it has been agreed that once in Paris our 'conversations of the saloon,' as we call them, would continue. M. de Fersen's position and mine, being most independent at the Court of France, I shall not be submitted to any duties but such as I am willing to assume, and I assure you that no pleasures, no diversions, will induce me to miss these pleasant, friendly chats of daily recurrence, if, however," added Madame de Fersen, smiling, "if your old friends will allow you to think of your new friends. But I count very much on my claims as a stranger, and on your perfect French gallantry, to oblige you to be my cicerone, and to do the honours of Paris for me, for I wish to see nothing, to admire nothing, unless under your guidance."

I will confess, I had need of all my courage, all my love, and a great terror of the withering calumnies of the world, to enable me to thrust aside the delightful prospect which Madame de Fersen dreamt for us both.

After a few minutes of silence, "Madame," said I, with deep and sad emotion, "you cannot doubt my respectful attachment for you?"

"What a question! On the contrary, I believe in it firmly; yes, I believe I would be wretched if I could not believe."

"Well, then, madame, permit a true and devoted friend to tell you what he might say to a sister; and when you will have heard me, do not permit yourself to yield to your first impression, for it would be unfavourable to me; but second thoughts will prove to you that what I am going to say is dictated by the strongest and most sincere affection."

"Speak then, I beg you — speak — you alarm me."

"Until now, madame, you have never known calumny; it did not, it could not, attack you. It is that sublime confidence in your own high-mindedness that has saved you from the fear of evil speaking. Yet, believe me, madame, were I to avail myself of the delightful prospect you hold out to me, the irreproachable purity of your principles would not guarantee you from the most perfidious attacks."

"Never shall I abandon my friends from fear, my conscience suffices me," said Madame de Fersen, with the courageous indifference of a woman sure of herself.

"How can you tell, madame?" I exclaimed. "Have you struggled, to be so sure of victory? Never! Until now the dazzling purity of your life has sufficed to guard you. How could you have given rise to slander? But reflect now. I have come with you all the way from Khios, all the way from Toulon to Paris. I am aware that I am of not the slightest importance; you know me now well enough to believe that I do not exaggerate my importance for the sake of a miserable paltry vanity. But what is that to the world so long as it can malign? Does it not know, moreover, that slander is all the more

odious when the object of the guilty love it supposes is least worthy of that love? We shall associate with the same people, I shall be seen every day at your house, escorting you in your walks, in society with you, and you believe, you insist, that jealousy, envy, and hatred will not seize upon the opportunity of revenging themselves for your wit, your beauty, and your exalted position; and above all for your shining virtue, the most precious jewel in your noble crown! But think of it, madame, the arch-type of our judge-executioners has said: 'Give me four lines of writing of the most honest man in the world, and I will undertake to have him hung.' The world, that judge-executioner, may say with equal assurance, 'Give me four days of the life of the purest woman in the world, and I will undertake to have her disgraced.'"

For some time Madame de Fersen had been gazing at me with an astonishment she could not disguise. At first she seemed almost shocked at my refusal and my remarks.

It was not unexpected. Then her features assumed a more amiable expression, and she said, with a shade of coldness:

"I will not discuss with you as to your views of the world, especially of Parisian society, which I am aware is most brilliant and dangerous; but I believe you exaggerate the risk one would run, and above all the effect of slander upon me."

"And why then, madame, should calumny have no effect on you? What am I to you that you should hereafter hesitate for one instant to sacrifice me to the imperious demands of your reputation? Would you put in the balance the guardianship of your honour, your responsibility for your child's future, with the charm of our daily conversations? Most assuredly not, and you would be right; for if you persisted in your project, if I were base enough to encourage you in it, when slander

reached you, you would have the right to turn upon me with scorn and say: 'You pretended to be my friend! You were false! You took advantage of my indiscretion to draw me into an intimacy where appearances may be most damaging. Go; I shall never see you again!' And once more you would be right, madame. Can you realise how much courage it takes to speak to you as I do,—to refuse what you offer? Think of what you are, of all that you are, and say if the pride and vanity of a less honest man than I would not be gratified and flattered by those very rumours from which I strive to save you. For, after all, what do I risk in aiding you to compromise yourself? What do I risk? To assist the world to misinterpret, to wither with its customary malice our intercourse, however innocent it may be? But, you reply, in that case you would drive me from your presence. What does that matter? Do you know how the world would interpret this deserved banishment? It would be said that a discord had arisen between us. If the world were well disposed towards you, it would say you had discarded me in favour of some other lover. If it was unfavourable to you it would say that I had abandoned you for another mistress."

"Ah, monsieur, monsieur!" exclaimed Madame de Fersen, pressing her hands together almost in terror. "What a picture! May it never come true!"

"It is but too true, madame; if the world were wise and clear-sighted as it is supposed to be, it would be less dangerous, for it would keep to the truth; but it is wicked, coarsely credulous, and a gossip, which renders it most mischievous. The world clear-sighted! It is too willing to slander to be clear-sighted. Has it time and leisure to penetrate the sentiments it supposes? It loves too well to keep on the outside, and conjecture from appearances which frequently are displayed without mistrust because they are guiltless,—that is enough for the infernal activity of its envy. Ah, believe me, madame,

had I not the sad experience I possess of men and things, the instinct of my attachment to you would enlighten me, for you never can know how precious to me is all that concerns you, how distressed I should be to see that radiant halo which now enhances your beauty tarnished. I repeat it, the honour of my mother, of my sister, are not more precious to me than yours. Think how dreadful it would be for me if I were the cause of slander which should attack that treasure in which I glory. I will confess another weakness. Yes, it would be hateful to me to think that the world should speak with its insolent and brutal scorn of that which was my happiness and my pride. Yes, my dream is that this charming intimacy, which will ever be one of the most delightful recollections of my life, shall remain unknown to this world, for its shameless word would destroy the purity of this intercourse, — and this dream, I shall realise it."

"Then," said Madame de Fersen, with an almost solemn air, "we must give up all thought of meeting in Paris?"

"Not so, madame, not so! We shall meet the evenings you receive, just like all the other people you receive. Later, perhaps, you will permit me occasionally to call on you of a morning."

Madame de Fersen remained for some time in silent meditation, her head bent low; then suddenly she drew herself up; her face was slightly tinged with colour, and, with a voice betraying much agitation, she said: "You have a generous heart. Your friendship is austere, but it is great, strong, and noble. I understand the duties which it imposes and I will be worthy of it. From this moment," and she gave me her hand, "you have won a sincere and unalterable friendship."

I kissed her hand respectfully.

At the same moment we reached one of the last post-stations.

I left Madame de Fersen's coach, and sought her husband, who was asleep in my chaise.

"My dear prince," I said to him, "I wish to ask a service of you."

"Speak, my dear count."

"For a reason which I must keep secret, I wish that no one should know that I come from Khios, and consequently that I travelled from Toulon to Paris with you. I am a personage of so little importance that my name will not have been noticed on our journey. I shall stop at the next relay, make a long round to reach Fontainebleau, where I shall remain several days, and will thus arrive in Paris some time after you. All that I ask of your friendship is that you will receive favourably the request of one of my friends who will ask permission to present me to you. I should regret it keenly were I obliged to suspend an intercourse so delightful to me."

M. de Fersen, with his usual tact, made no objection, and promised all that I asked.

At the next relay, I informed Madame de Fersen that I was unfortunately obliged to take my leave of her, and delegated to the prince, who was present, the task of explaining to her why I was deprived of the pleasure of continuing the journey with her.

She gave me her hand, which I kissed.

Then I tenderly embraced Irene, throwing a sad farewell glance at her mother.

Fresh horses were put to the carriages of the prince, they started, and I remained alone.

My heart was broken.

Little by little the consciousness of having acted nobly towards Madame de Fersen soothed my mind.

I reflected that I should thus learn without in any way endangering her reputation whether Madame de Fersen felt for me a true friendship, perhaps even a more tender sentiment, or whether I owed to isolation,

to idleness, and to the absence of all comparison, the interest which she had shown me.

If she loved me, the constraint, the necessity of no longer seeing me, would be irksome to her, would perhaps be painful, and this sorrow, this regret, would assuredly betray itself.

If, on the other hand, I had only been an agreeable acquaintance who had helped to while away the long hours of the journey, I should, without doubt, be sacrificed to the first more entertaining conversation, or the slightest worldly consideration.

I would never willingly expose myself to be superseded, and I thus avoided it.

I would doubtless suffer much, should I find that Madame de Fersen's sentiments for me were so weak that they were easily effaced, but in acting otherwise I would have had the same sorrow and mortification besides.

I remained eight days at Fontainebleau and then left for Paris.

CHAPTER XVI.

A MINISTER IN LOVE.

I REËNTERED Paris, from which I had been absent eighteen months, with a certain heartache. I had a faint hope, or rather some dread, of meeting Hélène or Marguerite.

I fancied myself completely cured of my fatal monomania of distrust; my great love for Madame de Fersen had, in my eyes, performed this prodigy. I promised myself, in case I should meet my cousin, or Madame de Pënâfiel, frankly to ask their forgiveness, and to endeavour by the most affectionate and friendly attentions to make amends for the hateful follies of the lover of former days.

I met M. de Cernay, who from the Opéra had transferred his amorous worship to the Comédie-Française, in the suite of Mlle. ——, a most enticing soubrette.

M. de Pommerive was heavier, more slanderous, and more wearisome than ever. Cernay greeted me with effusive cordiality, and asked me about my travels with Falmouth, for as yet nothing had transpired.

As I was very reserved on this subject, as much by natural tendency as by premeditation, Cernay and Pommerive ended by imagining the most unheard-of things on the pretended mystery of my adventures.

In accordance with my arrangement with the prince, I begged a man of my acquaintance, very intimate with the Russian ambassador, to present me to Madame de Fersen.

The prince had rented a handsome furnished mansion in the Faubourg St. Germain.

Before long his salons were the customary meeting-place of the *corps diplomatique* and of the cream of Parisian society, regardless of political opinions.

Madame de Fersen's appearance in the world caused a sensation. Her beauty, her name, and her reputation as a woman versed in politics and interested in the great topics of the day, the respect which she inspired, all contributed to place her very high in public estimation.

In a short time the just appreciation of the rare qualities that distinguished her was followed by the most pronounced infatuation.

The women who shared her austere principles were delighted and proud to strengthen their ranks with such a recruit. Those, on the contrary, who might have dreaded her coldness, taking it as a mute censure of their flightiness, were charmed and surprised at her great amiability. Assured of not finding in her a rival, they became enthusiastic regarding the beautiful stranger.

I can scarcely express my happiness at Madame de Fersen's success.

I went to her house for the first time one evening, five or six days after my arrival in Paris.

Though rather late, there were as yet few people assembled.

She greeted me very gracefully; but I observed in her a certain reserve, uneasiness, and sadness.

I fancied she wished to speak to me in private.

I was striving to ascertain what could be her anxiety, when, in the course of conversation, M. de Sérigny, at that time Minister of Foreign Affairs, spoke of children in connection with an admirable portrait which Lawrence had just exhibited at the Salon.

Madame de Fersen gave me a rapid glance, and then

complained that her daughter was ailing and sad at finding herself thrown among strangers, and that no distraction had availed to draw her out of her melancholy, — neither games nor walks in the large gardens surrounding the mansion.

"But, madame," said I, hoping to be understood, "would it not be better to send your daughter to the Tuileries Gardens? She would find there companions more of her own age, and their gaiety would doubtless divert her."

A touching glance from Madame de Fersen showed me she had understood, for she replied, quickly: "*Mon Dieu!* you are right, monsieur. I am very sorry I did not think of that sooner. From to-morrow, I shall always send my little girl to the Tuileries. I am sure she will be very happy there, and already I feel assured she will get well."

I was happy to see from this mysterious interchange of thoughts that Madame de Fersen's heart read mine.

Fresh visitors interrupted the conversation, the circle grew larger, and I rose to go and chat with some ladies of my acquaintance.

"Ah, *mon Dieu!*" exclaimed Madame de ——, "M. de Pommerive here! That man thrusts himself everywhere, then?"

In fact, there was Pommerive, with a less impudent air than usual, following in the steps of the *chargé d' affaires* of some little German court, who was doubtless leading him up to Madame de Fersen.

"It is a presentation," said Madame de —— to me.

"If there were justice," I replied, "it would be an exposition."

"But how can Madame de Fersen receive affably so slanderous and false a man?" said Madame de ——.

"To prove, doubtless, the weakness of that man's calumnies," replied I.

Pommerive made a profound bow to Madame de Fersen, then followed the *chargé d'affaires*, and both went in search of M. de Fersen.

A few minutes later, I found myself face to face with Pommerive.

"Hello! Are you here?" he cried.

This exclamation was so absurdly impertinent, that I answered:

"If I were less polite, M. de Pommerive, I might express my astonishment at finding you here."

"I am not at all astonished at it," said Pommerive with an impudent assurance, for which he was indebted to his age, and to a reputation for cynic cowardice, which I should have stated he was wont to boast of. "I did not expect to meet you; that is all. But listen." Then, taking my arm, he led me to the recess of a window, saying as we moved along: "Do you know the Prince de Fersen very well?"

Pommerive was repugnant to me, but I was curious to know if people had heard of my having travelled with the princess, and as Pommerive was sure to pick up the slightest report, true or false, he might enlighten me on this subject.

"I do not know M. de Fersen any better than you know him," I said.

"Then you know him very well," he replied, conceitedly.

"How is that?"

"Certainly. I dined with him yesterday, a miserable dinner it is true, at Baron ——'s, *chargé d'affaires* of ——, who brought me here just now in his carriage! And what a carriage! a wretched concern with a glass window in the back, a regular rattletrap. It is indeed a carriage which seems made expressly to help to digest his bad dinners, so hard is it; for that miserly fellow scrapes up dowries for his six hideous daughters from the allowance made him for entertaining; and he is right,

for without dowry who the devil would look twice at any of his daughters? But I come back to the prince."

"Very unfortunate for him, M. de Pommerive."

"Oh, not at all! I shall be careful of the dear prince, for he appreciates me, and I have come to make an appointment for our business."

"And what business, M. de Pommerive? May one, without being indiscreet, inquire into this diplomatic secret?"

"Oh, it is quite plain; he asked that miserly baron —" and here Pommerive opened a parenthesis to insert another piece of malice. "Speaking of this miserly baron," he continued, "would you believe it? when he gives his wretched dinners, a sort of *Maître Jacques* goes once around the table with a miserable bottle of champagne, not iced, which he holds tightly in his arms, just as a nurse holds her precious nursling; and he says very quickly, as he passes on still more quickly, 'Monsieur does not drink champagne,' without any point of interrogation, the wretch, but with an accent of affirmation."

"See now the value of punctuation, M. de Pommerive! But come back to the prince."

"Well, M. de Fersen having asked the baron to point out to him some one of enlightenment and good taste who could coach him on theatrical matters, and give him information about the actors, the baron has had the good sense to present me."

"Ah, I understand," I replied, "you are going to be M. de Fersen's dramatic cicerone."

"That is it exactly; but, between us, I find this fondness for the theatre very ridiculous in a man like the prince. To judge by this sample he must be a poor sort of a fellow, this Fersen. I am not surprised at people saying that his wife directs all the diplomatic affairs. She has the appearance of a strong-minded woman, sharp and hard; and, moreover, they say a thirty-six carats virtue. What do I care about her

virtue? I do not grudge it to her, though there is not a dissenting voice. It is astonishing!"

"There is something even more astonishing, M. de Pommerive."

"And what is it, dear count?"

"It is that some straightforward, honourable man has not the courage to go to M. de Fersen and repeat word for word all the insolent things you have permitted yourself to say about him, so that he might kick you out of his house."

"Dash it! no one would surely go and repeat to him what I have said! I feel pretty safe on that score; but if any one did I would not care, I would stand by my words."

"You are boasting, M. de Pommerive!"

"What, I boasting! That does not prevent that on one occasion they repeated to Verpuis — you know Verpuis, who was such a duellist — that I had said that he had only the courage of foolhardiness. Verpuis comes to me with his bullying air and asks me in the presence of twenty persons, 'Did you make use of these words, yes or no?' 'No, sir,' I replied, also putting on a bullying air, 'I said, on the contrary, that you had only the foolhardiness of courage.'"

"You certainly did not say that, M. de Pommerive!"

"I did, and the proof of it is that he kicked me. I then said that it was cowardly to insult a man who would not fight; and he took that."

This disgusting boast of cowardice, for Pommerive had never quite lowered himself to that extent, revolted me. I turned my back upon the man, but could not shake him off readily.

"You will see," said he, "one of your old flames, the pretty Madame de V——, with whom M. de Sérigny, Minister of Foreign Affairs, is madly in love. They say really that he is crazy enough to be shut up in a lunatic asylum since he has been pursuing that little

woman; he knows neither what he says, nor what he does. This diplomatic *céladon* would make you die with laughter, if he was not such a pitiable object. But here he comes. I must go and beg him not to forget my recommendation of my nephew. Let us hope that his ridiculous love affair has not made him lose his memory as well as his wits."

And this insolent person approached M. de Sérigny with abject salutations.

At this moment Madame de V—— was announced.

I had not seen her since my return to Paris. I found her, if possible, looking younger, so much freshness, piquancy, and sparkle did that lively, mobile countenance display.

Madame de V—— dressed in a manner quite her own, but never showy or eccentric, and always with the most perfect taste.

The minister, who had got rid of Pommerive, watched with an anxious and jealous eye the numerous salutations which she acknowledged on all sides with her sparkling coquetry. He seemed somewhat easier when he saw Madame de V—— seated between Lady Bury and another lady.

M. de Sérigny, at that time Minister of Foreign Affairs, was a man of about fifty years of age, rather insignificant and careless in his appearance. He affected a brusqueness of manner, a heedless indifference, which, assumed or not, had always, people said, been of remarkable service to him in his career. He was a man of fine, broad mind, but in society he rarely made use of his intellectual faculties. His superiority was summed up in his taciturnity, and the sole expression of his countenance was concentrated in a smile. Now this silence and this smile, completing, interpreting, and explaining one another, could in turns be so admirably flattering, sarcastic, wicked, or absent, that this language had really a great significance.

Jealous to an excess, his passion for Madame de V—— was intense, at least according to the world of whom Pommerive was the faithful echo.

When a man of the age, character, and position of M. de Sérigny becomes seriously enamoured of a woman so frivolous and coquettish as Madame de V——, his amorous life can only be a prolonged torture.

As I wished to observe M. de Sérigny in his rôle of martyr, I slid behind the easy chair in which sat Madame de V——, and went to salute her.

I well knew the vivacity of her demeanour, and was quite prepared for the explosive friendly recognition. I had formerly rejected the conditions which might have made me succeed in obtaining her favours, but we had parted on the best of terms, and I had kept secret all that passed between us. Now Madame de V——, who unfortunately had more than once exposed herself to being roughly handled, was naturally grateful to me for my prudence.

Scarcely had she heard my voice, therefore, than she turned abruptly, and holding out her hand exclaimed, with her customary volubility:

"What a delightful surprise! and how happy I am to see you once more! But have you fallen from the clouds that no one knew of your return? and I who have really so much to thank you for! Now then give me your arm, and we will settle ourselves in some solitary nook in the next parlour, for you cannot imagine all I have to say to you."

Thereupon, up she jumps from her seat, and, making her way through the crowd surrounding the easy chair, she takes my arm, and we walk out of the big salon into another room which was nearly empty.

Standing talking at the entrance of this room were Madame de Fersen and M. de Sérigny.

Madame de V—— had such compromising ways that nothing with her was insignificant, and she found means

during our short progress from one room to the other to call attention to herself by her affectation in whispering to me and then bursting into peals of laughter.

Just as we passed in front of Madame de Fersen, the latter, astonished at Madame de V——'s noisy ways, gave me a look which seemed uneasy and almost inquiring.

The minister stared at me moodily, coloured up a little, assumed his most affable smile, and said to Madame de V——, with a foppish air, without being heard by the princess: "You are going to establish there a colony of admirers which will soon become more populous than the metropolis."

"Provided you do not interfere in its administration," retorted Madame de V——, laughing playfully; then she added, in a low voice, "You must confess that there is nothing like love to make an idiot of a man. M. de Sérigny is a man of great intellect, and yet you heard him! Is it flattering to inspire a sentiment which is expressed so stupidly under pretence of being sincere?" While saying these words, she seated herself near a table covered with albums. I took a place near her, and we chatted.

During this conversation, two or three times my eyes met those of Madame de Fersen, who, each time she perceived I was looking at her, quickly turned her gaze.

M. de Sérigny watched Madame de V—— all the time and seemed on thorns.

A woman came up; Madame de Fersen took her arm and went into the salon.

The minister was doubtless coming towards us when he was arrested by Baron ——, who, according to Pommerive, accumulated his daughters' dowries from the appropriation for entertainments.

I do not know if the subject of his talk with M. de Sérigny was very important, but I have my doubts as to

the attention given him by the minister, so engaged was he in watching Madame de V——.

"Well," said I to my companion, "it is then true? Those charming hands hold the fate of Europe? The reign of female sovereigns and of enslaved ministers is returning? How delightful! It looks as rococo as possible and seems very pretty. See now, for instance, at this very moment you are entangling wildly the destinies of the grand duchy of ——, for the *chargé d' affaires* of that poor little court seems to me to have exhausted all his arguments, and you look as if he had spoken Greek."

"Let us for once exhaust this miserable subject of conversation," said Madame de V—— with vivacity, "never to return to it. Yes, M. de Sérigny pays furious court to me, and I do not reject his attentions. I am even very coquettish with him, because it amuses me to tyrannise over a man in so high a position; and then, as they attribute to me as much influence over him as they attribute to him worship of me, you can have no idea of the snares laid for me by the *corps diplomatique* to make me talk. For my own amusement, I make quite innocently the most absurd half confidences, but you can well see that all this can hardly afford amusement to a boarding-school miss. This is my confession; grant me plenary absolution, at least out of pity, for M. de Sérigny is a wearisome sin. And now, in your turn, tell me of your travels, your adventures, your love affairs, and I will see if I can grant you absolution."

"To speak in your own language, I will confess, in the first place, that my greatest sin is being still in love with you."

"Hold!" said Madame de V——, changing voice, manner, and expression, and taking a tone until now unknown to me. "You behaved nobly as regards Madame de Pënâfiel; she was worth a thousand times more than I. I hated her, perhaps I envied her, for she

deserved all your love. I demanded of you a base act which might have ruined her, and you refused. Nothing was more simple for you. But this shameful proposition, which I have not ceased to blush having made you, you have kept it secret; you have not made use of this weapon to strike a woman whom every one attacks, perhaps because she deserves it; and true, true as I am a dolt, I shall never, in all my life, forget how good and generous you have been to me in this matter." Madame de V—— looked at me with a softened glance, and for a moment I saw tears in those eyes usually bright and sparkling like brilliants.

I was at first tempted to attribute these tears to a skilful flash, but the mind of this woman was so mobile and inconstant that I believed in the sincerity of this temporary emotion, and I was touched by it. Softness in this woman, however, could only be an accident, and I replied:

"I have done for you what any honourable man would have done; but you, do something for me truly meritorious; come, love me frankly in your own way, as a coquette, heedlessly, faithlessly, if you will, and I will imitate you. One is never more amiable than when one has to implore forgiveness, therefore we shall be mutually charming. Nothing more delightful; we shall confide our faithlessness to one another, and will betray each other in the frankest way possible."

"M. Arthur," said Madame de V——, still with a serious, softened air and with a voice trembling with emotion, "I am going to say something which to any other but you would appear improper and incomprehensible; but remember this, and believe that I honour you too much — I love you too much — to have you appear as M. de Sérigny's successor."

In spite of myself I was struck by the expression with which Madame de V—— uttered these words.

This attack of sensitiveness, however, was of short

duration; for she soon commenced answering with her accustomed gaiety and bantering to the minister's gallantries. He, with considerable difficulty, had shaken off the Baron de V——, and had come up to us.

Caring very little to be a third in M. de Sérigny's company, I rose. Madame de V—— then said: "Do not forget that I am always at home on Thursdays, so as to avoid me on those days which are devoted to bores; but on the other days, if your triumphs leave you leisure, do not neglect an old friend. You are pretty sure to find me in the mornings, and sometimes even of an evening before I make my evening toilet." With these words, which she accompanied with a most gracious smile, she rose, took M. de Sérigny's arm, and said: "I would like a cup of tea, for I am cold."

"I am at your service, madame," said the minister, who happily had assumed his most absent and indifferent smile, while Madame de V—— invited me to call and see her.

Returning to the salon, my eyes sought Madame de Fersen; I met her glance, which seemed austere.

I went home.

When I was no longer under the charm of Madame de V——'s attractive face, I compared that daring levity with Madame de Fersen's dignified and serious grace. I also compared the profound respect and almost obsequious reserve with which men approached her to the cavalier deportment they exhibited towards Madame de V——, and I felt more and more how powerful is the attraction a virtuous woman possesses, and I felt my love for Catherine still increasing.

I was glad that I might look forward to meeting Irene at the Tuileries, and that I had been so well understood by Madame de Fersen. I fancied also — was it an illusion of love? — that Madame de Fersen had seemed almost sad at my long conversation with Madame de V——.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE TUILERIES.

I WAITED with extreme impatience the hour for going to the Tuileries to meet Irene.

I attached a thousand thoughts of love and noble devotion in reflecting that that child was coming to me covered with the bloom of her mother's kisses, and doubtless bringing me a thousand secret wishes.

About one o'clock, though the air was opaque with a slight autumnal fog, I saw Irene approaching, accompanied by her nurse, an excellent woman who had filled the same position to Madame de Fersen.

Generally at Toulon, or Lyons for instance, where we had made a few days' stay, one of the princess's maids, followed by a footman, had always accompanied Irene in her walks.

I noticed with pleasure that Madame de Fersen, by entrusting her little girl this time to the nurse, of whose attachment she felt sure, had understood the necessity of keeping these meetings secret.

Tears sprang to my eyes when I saw how much Irene had changed. Her charming face was pale and pinched; no longer with its habitual pallor, delicate and roseate, but with a sickly pallor; her large eyes had dark rings under them, and her cheeks, formerly plump and round, were now slightly hollowed.

Irene did not see me at first; she walked close to her nurse, her pretty head bent down, her arms hanging, and

with the tips of her pretty feet she crushed the dead leaves which littered the path.

"Good morning, Irene," I said to her.

Scarcely had she heard the sound of my voice, than she gave a piercing cry, threw herself into my arms, closed her eyes and fainted.

I carried her to a bench near by with the help of Madame Paul, her nurse.

"I feared this shock, monsieur," she said to me; "fortunately, I brought a bottle of salts with me. Poor child! she is so nervous."

"Look — look," said I, "the colour returns to her cheeks; her hands are not so cold; she is regaining consciousness."

In fact, this attack passed, Irene raised herself, and when she could sit up she hung to my neck, shedding silent tears which fell hot upon my cheeks.

"Irene, Irene, my dearest, do not weep thus. I shall see you every day."

I pressed her hands while my eyes sought hers.

She held herself up, and with a familiar motion of her head, full of grace and vivacity, she threw back the big curls which half concealed her tear-stained eyes. Then fastening upon me one of her steady, piercing glances, she said to me:

"I believe what you say. Will you not come to see me here, since you cannot come to our house?"

"Yes, Mlle. Irene," answered the nurse. "Monsieur will come to see you every day, if you promise to be very good, — not to cry, and to do what the doctor orders you."

"Certainly, my dear child; for unless you promise that, you will not see me again," I added, with great seriousness.

"You would never again see monsieur," rejoined Madame Paul, with an air of severity.

"But, Paul," exclaimed Irene, stamping her little foot with charming fractiousness, "you know very well I

shall no longer cry. I shall not be ill any more, for I shall see him every day."

The good nurse gave me a touching glance. I quickly embraced Irene, and said to her, "Explain to me, little one, why you are so glad to see me?"

"I don't know," she replied, shrugging her shoulders and shaking her brown curls, with an air of sweet, unconscious simplicity. "When you look at me, I cannot help going to you, your eyes draw me; and when you do not look at me, then I feel so badly here," and she placed her hand on her heart. "And then at night, I see you in my dreams, with me and the angels up there." She raised her little finger and her large eyes solemnly towards heaven. Then with a sigh she added, "And, besides, you are good, like Ivan."

I could not help starting.

Madame Paul, evidently informed of this mysterious adventure, exclaimed: "Mademoiselle, remember what your mother told you."

But engrossed in her thoughts, and seeming not to have heard her nurse's remark, Irene continued:

"Only, when I dreamt of Ivan and the angels, I never saw my mother up there; but since I dream of you, my mother is always with us. I told mamma so," Irene added, seriously.

Madame Paul looked at me again, and bursting into tears said: "Ah, monsieur, all my dread is that this child will not live; her beauty, her gravity, like her ideas and her character, are not suited to her age, are not of this world. Would you believe it, except to the princess, to you, and to me, she never speaks to any one of what she has just said? The princess has impressed upon her not to mention to any one that she saw you here, and I am very sure she never will. Ah, monsieur, I pray Heaven daily that this child may be spared to us."

"And she will be spared, be assured! Children who

are silent and thoughtful are always dreamy and excitable; it is not surprising. Do not be uneasy. Well, good-bye, Irene; and you, Madame Paul, assure the princess of my respectful regards, and say how grateful I am for the promise she made me to send me daily my little friend."

"Adieu, then, till to-morrow, Irene," and I kissed her tenderly.

"Till to-morrow," repeated the child, with a happy but grave and serious smile.

Then her nurse wrapped her warm pelisse around her, and Irene went off, turning several times, however, to say adieu with her little hand.

Superstitious as I am, and inclined to tender and lofty sentiments by my love for Catherine, this conversation had aroused in me the most varied emotions, — emotions at once sombre and beaming, cruel and radiant.

I was happy. The strange predictions which Irene repeated to her mother must, if Catherine loved me, recall me to her heart daily, and it was the voice of her child, her beloved child, which continually uttered my name!

And this strange, fatal connection between Ivan's death and the fate that might be awaiting me, — must it not act upon Madame de Fersen's imagination and excite her interest in me? If she saw but little of me, did she not know that this reserve on my part was a cruel sacrifice I imposed upon myself for her sake?

At other times, I acknowledge the weakness, the persistency of Irene's predictions, in spite of myself, chilled me.

I experienced a sort of vertigo, of fearful attraction, similar to that which draws you to look down a precipice when you are walking at its edge.

Unless the weather was too cold or rainy, the nurse brought Irene to me every day.

By degrees she returned to blooming health.

About a fortnight after our first meeting, she brought me a large bouquet of roses, telling me her mother sent them, but, unfortunately, they were not as beautiful as the roses of Khios.

This souvenir of Catherine's overjoyed me, for I had spoken to her with enthusiasm of those lovely roses.

Every day after that Irene brought me roses; and every day also she told me, with an air of mystery, without ever making a mistake, what her mother would do that evening, whether she was going to court, or in society, or to the theatre.

Thanks to this amiable forethought of Madame de Fersen, I met her very frequently. I went regularly to her receptions, and, therefore, saw her almost every evening; but as in society I confined myself to greeting her most respectfully, exchanging merely a few ceremonious words, our meetings were unobserved.

Once or twice I called on her of a morning; but by a singular chance, or rather in consequence of the assiduities with which she was surrounded, I never found her alone.

Had I asked her for a private interview she would have granted it, but, true to the plan I had mapped out, I would not ask for it at present.

Besides, a smile, a glance that we mysteriously exchanged in the crowd, did it not repay me a thousand times for my reserve and my discretion?

Would I not give the most public and most marked attentions for the slightest favour which should be unknown to the world!

Notwithstanding the daily intercourse which I maintained with Madame de Fersen through Irene, notwithstanding our exchange of flowers (for each day I also brought Irene a beautiful bouquet of roses, which her

mother wore at night), not a soul suspected this delightful intimacy.

As a measure of prudence I would meet Irene in turn at the Tuileries, at the Luxembourg, at Mousseaux, or on the boulevards. I never made use of my horses to go to these meetings, for fear of attracting attention.

I wrapped myself up in a cloak, and took delight in putting as much mystery in these meetings as if Madame de Fersen herself had been in question.

It was perfect folly, but I waited for the hour of meeting with this child full of candour and innocence with a loving, restless, ardent impatience; I counted the minutes, the seconds; I feared and hoped by turns; in fact, I experienced all the irritating and delicious emotions of the most passionate love.

I commented eagerly on each of Irene's words, to seek, to discover, her mother's secret thought! And when I fancied I could interpret this thought in a manner more tender than usual, I returned home with paradise in my heart.

Inexhaustible treasures of a pure and chaste love! Philosophers, atheists, or the strong-minded in love will, doubtless, mock me. I myself, before my sojourn at Khios, would not have understood all its charm.

I was now more than ever in love.

By the rare versatility of her endowments, Madame de Fersen achieved an exalted position in society. Calumny itself admired her and praised her beyond measure, doubtless to give a colour of impartiality, whereby its accusations became more dangerous.

My interviews with Irene had continued for about three weeks.

One evening at one of Madame de Fersen's receptions, the prince said to me, in confidence:

"The frivolous and subtle air of Paris is fatal to

serious thought; the trifles of the world gain the mastery over reason. Would you believe it, Cæsar's wife has become quite indifferent to the interests of the empire! In a word, can you realise that Madame de Fersen has become totally heedless of politics? Can you imagine such a thing?"

I compared this symptom with the signs of impatience and uneasiness shown by Catherine during my long conversation with Madame de V——, and I resolved to push further my observations.

The next evening at a ball at the English embassy, at which Madame de Fersen was present, I again met Madame de V——.

I paid assiduous attentions to her the whole evening, and observed Madame de Fersen's countenance; it was impassible.

Next day I feared, or rather I hoped, that Irene would not appear at her accustomed hour, or that she might come perhaps without her bouquet. I would have considered this change as a mark of resentment or jealousy on the part of Madame de Fersen; but Irene and the bouquet of roses appeared as usual.

Piqued by this indifference, and wishing to ascertain if it were real; desirous, also, of completely misleading public opinion, I continued to pay the most marked attentions to Madame de V——.

Delighted to have found a means of annoying the minister, and of keeping him constantly agitated and on the watch, Madame de V—— encouraged me with all her might.

She called this exhibition of cruel coquetry "heaping fuel upon the fire."

Now, at the risk of being taken for a log (as Pluvier would have said), I so skilfully fed the devouring jealousy of the minister that, after eight or ten days of this kind of courting, Madame de V—— and I found ourselves horribly compromised; and it was generally recognised

and taken for granted that the reign, or rather the bondage, of the minister was at an end.

I became aware of the gravity of these absurd rumours by the friendly, courteous, and gracious tone of the minister, who was too much a man of the world to appear cold or sulky towards his supposed rival.

This discovery enlightened me as to the folly of my conduct, which not only might wound Madame de Fersen, if she loved me, but might lower me irreparably in her estimation. Instinctively I felt that I had pushed things too far.

These fears were increased by a singular circumstance.

One evening at a concert at Lord P——'s, I had been for some time chatting with Madame de V——. We were in a small parlour where only a few persons were gathered. Little by little, these adjourned to the tea-room, leaving Madame de V—— and myself perfectly alone.

I was preoccupied from a very natural cause; Madame de V—— had just informed me of the receipt of a letter announcing the arrival of Madame de Pënâfiel in Rome.

While talking, I happened to look at a mirror, reflecting the door of the salon. What was my amazement when I saw Madame de Fersen, whose eyes were fastened on me with a most sorrowful look!

I quickly rose, but she disappeared.

I awaited the morrow with anxiety.

Irene came, as usual, with her bouquet of roses, and told me her mother was going that night to the Variétés.

I made her twice repeat to me this information, for the choice of the theatre seemed extraordinary, but, reflecting on the prince's taste for vaudevilles, I explained it to myself.

I sent to secure a stall, and in the evening went to that theatre.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE BEAR AND THE PACHA.

Among other plays at the Variétés that evening, they were giving "The Bear and the Pacha." This was one of M. de Fersen's triumphs at Constantinople, where he had taken, with great success, the part of Schaabaham, and he was most eager to see Brunet playing the same part.

Madame de Fersen arrived about nine o'clock, with her husband and the Duchess of ——. They took their places in a proscenium box, of which the lattices were half raised.

Catherine saw me, and gave me a gracious bow.

I found her pale and changed.

I have no recollection of the piece they played, and on the fall of the curtain I went to Madame de Fersen's box.

She was not well. I was looking at her attentively, when the prince said: "Be our umpire; you rarely see Madame de Fersen, and can better than any one notice a change; do you not find she has fallen away very much?"

I said I did not think so; that Madame de Fersen seemed to me in perfect health. The prince proclaimed me an impudent flatterer, etc.

The curtain rose, and I left the box.

I returned to my seat.

They began "The Bear and the Pacha."

This burlesque did not bring a smile to Madame de

Fersen's countenance, but her husband applauded frantically, and I must confess I shared the general merriment.

One of those loudest in laughter was a man seated just in front of me, and of whom I could only see the thick, gray, curly locks.

I had never heard such ringing, joyous laughter, — at times it became almost convulsive. At these times the man clung with both hands to the barrier dividing the stalls from the orchestra, and, strengthened by this prop, gave full scope to his hilarity.

Nothing is more contagious than laughter; the witticisms of the play had already excited my risible faculties, and, in spite of myself, the wild uproariousness of this man so affected me that I soon was nothing more than his echo, and to each of his immoderate bursts I responded with a no less boisterous explosion of laughter.

In short, I had not noticed that Madame de Fersen had left the theatre.

The curtain fell, and I rose.

The man who had yielded to such boisterous mirth also rose, turned towards me as he put on his hat, and exclaimed, with a return of joyful glee: "What a buffoon that Odry is!"

Amazed, I leaned on the back of my stall.

I had recognised the pirate of Porquerolles, the pilot of Malta.

I remained riveted to my seat, which was the end one of the orchestra. His seat was in front of mine, no one had to pass by us, and the spectators were slowly filing out.

It was indeed he!

It was his look, his bony, bronzed face, his thick, black eyebrows, his sharp teeth pointed and divided, as I could see, for he smiled with his strange smile, as he gazed at me audaciously.

The footlights were lowered, and the theatre became dark.

"It is you!" I cried, at length coming out of my stupor, and as if my chest had thrown off an enormous weight.

"Yes, certainly 'tis I. You remember me, then? Porquerolles and Malta! that is the password."

"Wretch!" I exclaimed.

"How, wretch?" he replied, with astounding effrontery. "We had a good free fight, I hope! If in boarding I stuck a knife in your shoulder, you answered me with a sharp axe on the head, my good friend! On the other hand, if your English dogs thrashed the crew of my mystic, I had the good luck to rip up your lord's yacht on the reefs of La Wardi. Hence we are even. And now we both meet splitting our sides at 'The Bear and the Pacha;' and, instead of finding the encounter droll, you get mad. Do you know that is a pretty low trick, my good friend?"

I must acknowledge that his audacity paralysed me. "But if I were to have you arrested?" I cried, rising and seizing him by the collar.

The pirate answered imperturbably, without seeking to free himself:

"That would be a fine trick to play. You may reckon besides how easy it would be to prove to an idiot of a Parisian police commissioner how I boarded your yacht off Cape Spartel, and how I wrecked her on the rocks of La Wardi, sou'west by south of the southern coast of the island of Malta. He'd think you were talking Greek, and would say you were crazy, my friend. Now, crazy you are not. You are a lad with a good stout fist, and not afraid of anything. If my life did not belong for the moment to my bride, to my charming bride," he added mockingly, and emphasising the word, "I should propose to take up our conversation where we left off on boarding the yacht. But, my word! my little wife is

waiting for me, and I prefer her conversation to yours."

"Here, now, gentlemen, we are going to shut up," cried the watchman of the theatre.

"That's so! and here we are chattering like two magpies. Adieu, young man, farewell," said the pirate.

And in two strides he disappeared.

I was so dazed that I did not leave the theatre until a second call from the watchman recalled me to my senses.

When, on my return home, I thought over my stupid amazement at meeting the pirate of Porquerolles, I charged myself with vacillation, and reproached myself for not having the rascal arrested; but, as he very wisely remarked, it would have been most embarrassing to me to prove forthwith my accusations, and on second thoughts, considering the difficulties presenting themselves, I concluded that my course of action was more judicious than I had thought at first.

Nevertheless, I wished to inform M. de Sérigny of the presence of this wretch in Paris, and of his double crime, which especially interested England; M. de Sérigny, as Minister of Foreign Affairs, could alone countenance and favour such steps as might necessarily be taken by Lord Stuart, then ambassador to France, to gather proofs of the crime, and obtain the extradition of the culprit.

The next morning, therefore, I wrote a few words to the minister, requesting the favour of a few minutes' interview.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE INTERVIEW.

I was preparing to go to the Luxembourg, where I expected to meet Irene, when I received a note from Madame de Fersen, asking me to call on her about two o'clock.

Since her arrival in Paris I had never met her alone.

To what should I attribute the wish she expressed? To her desire to see me? To her secret vexation at the rumours spread regarding my intimacy with Madame de V——? Catherine might think these rumours well founded, since she had surprised me alone with Madame de V—— at the concert at Lord P——'s house.

I could not say, but I waited for our interview with restless happiness and irresistible agitation.

I was going to see Catherine once more, to see her alone! At this thought my heart beat with hope and ecstasy at last; a word from her would reward me for my self-denial, for the generous sacrifice I had made, for the assiduous cares to which her beloved child almost owed her return to health.

From this interview I would draw fresh strength to devote myself still further; and then, I had so much to say to her! I felt so proud of my love, so happy to feel my heart still young enough to appreciate the pure joys which enchanted me; to feel that confidence in the strength, in the sincerity, of my attachment which enabled me to hope that some day my love would be reciprocated.

THE INTERVIEW.

At the appointed hour, I went to Madame de Fersen's.

She received me in a small parlour which she usually occupied, but which I had not yet seen.

"What a long time since I have seen you!" I cried with effusion as I held out my hand.

Madame de Fersen coldly gave me hers, and answered:

"I believe I had the pleasure of seeing you last night at the Variétés, monsieur."

"You call that seeing one another!" I replied, with sad astonishment. "Ah, I was right when I feared that the 'conversations of the saloon' would soon be forgotten by you!"

"I shall never forget our pleasant voyage," answered Madame de Fersen, in the same cold tone. "I am greatly obliged to you for the trouble you have taken in coming to see me this morning. I wish to thank you a thousand times, monsieur, for your kindness in yielding to my daughter's capricious fancies. She is now quite well, and I fear — I do not wish any longer to take advantage of your goodness towards her, monsieur."

Madame de Fersen's tone was icy, almost scornful. What she said seemed so true, so natural, so little influenced by resentment, that I was thunderstruck. I suffered horribly, and could find no word of reply.

My silence was so marked, that Madame de Fersen found herself obliged to add, very coldly:

"I doubtless appear to you very ungrateful, monsieur?"

"Madame," I said, with deep emotion, "I do not know how I have deserved such a reception."

"And what claim have you to a different reception from me?" proudly inquired Madame de Fersen.

My painful astonishment was at its height; for a moment I deluded myself, and endeavoured to attribute to jealousy this reception so different from what I had anticipated, but I repeat, Madame de Fersen's countenance betrayed no sign of repressed or concealed emotion.

I resolutely took my stand. I could not answer Madame de Fersen's question without reminding her of my noble and generous conduct towards her; and unwilling to lower myself by uttering reproaches, I was silent on that subject, and only said to her, endeavouring to conceal my emotion:

"The object of the interview you requested is doubtless attained. May I ask, madame, if you have any further orders to give me?"

"None, monsieur, but I again wish to express my grateful acknowledgments," said Madame de Fersen, rising.

This harshness shocked me. I was about to answer with some bitterness, when I became aware of something which I had not yet remarked, and which renewed a faint hope.

During our short interview, Madame de Fersen had not once raised her eyes from the embroidery upon which she was working.

Wishing to assure myself of the correctness of my observation, I stayed on some moments without uttering a word.

Catherine remained with her eyes lowered, instead of inquiring by a look the meaning of my silent presence.

"Adieu, madame," I said.

"Adieu, monsieur."

And I left without her granting me one single look of compassion or sorrow.

Her hand alone seemed to tremble slightly on her embroidery as she said adieu.

I took my departure heartbroken.

I had too great and too conscious a distrust of myself and my deserts to have the slightest hope of any success with Catherine.

I could not yield to my customary suspicious impulse, for I had implicit faith in Madame de Fersen's sincerity,

and I doubted of ever having aroused any sentiment in her heart. "She feels no tender affection for me, and her friendship even has vanished in the glare of brilliant worldly diversions."

I had been away from her almost always, and the effects and results of absence are unbounded and varied.

At times it strengthens a woman's secret sympathy, by concentrating her thoughts on the man who has attracted her, and whose charm is exaggerated by the distant mirage. A woman finds a proud, sad, and mysterious delight in the bitterness of her solitary regrets; she scorns the indifferent ones who occupy a place near her, which she so ardently wishes to see filled by one precious to her, and she detests those eager in their attentions because they are base enough to be there while the preferred one is far away.

Often, however, absence is forgetfulness, for some hearts are like mirrors, and only reflect objects that are present.

I therefore believed myself entirely forgotten by Madame de Fersen. I had anticipated the possibility of this cruel predicament, and, if it gave me deep sorrow, it did not occasion me great surprise.

In the climax of my despair, I made a thousand projects. I determined to shake off this grief, to give myself up to all life's dissipations, to seek amorous distraction in some fresh entanglement; but it takes time and a strong will for a heart deeply smitten to transfer its worship.

When a man knows he is loved, and is in possession of the woman he loves, he never experiences the slightest remorse at committing an infidelity; but when he is passionately desirous, and still anxiously looking for an avowal, faithlessness is an impossibility. He has the resolution to maintain fidelity only so long as he has not the right to offer it.

CHAPTER XX.

A MISSION.

THE day after my interview with Madame de Fersen I was sadly preoccupied, when my servant announced M. de Sérigny.

I was much astonished at his visit, for which, however, he accounted very graciously, saying that, passing by my door on his way to the Chambers, he had come in on the chance of saving me the trouble of going to the Foreign Office for the interview which I had requested.

This alacrity on his part did not at first seem natural to me; but, on reflection, I thought the rumours current about me and Madame de V—— had induced the minister to do something in excellent taste by showing himself so considerate.

In a few words I related to him the history of the pirate, and our singular encounter at the Variétés.

M. de Sérigny said that he was going immediately to confer with the British ambassador, and that he would consider the means to be used in order to seize so great a scoundrel.

Our conversation having fallen on travels, M. de Sérigny asked me with interest about those I had undertaken. He then became very flattering, insinuating, and amiable; told me he had known my father very well under the Empire; spoke of him as a man of fine attainments, great determination, and infinite tact, who had a remarkable knowledge of the world and of men. He said that the Emperor would assuredly have employed

him outside the military service, by entrusting him with some important mission, if my father's open and positive character could have submitted to Napoleon's caprices.

I was endeavouring to fathom the meaning of these flattering remarks, when M. de Sérigny said to me, with an air of charming good nature:

"Will you permit an old friend of your family to ask you a question? If it seems to you indiscreet, pray attribute it solely to the interest I take in your father's name."

"I am listening to you, monsieur, and can only be grateful for the good-will you show me."

"Well, how is it that, with your education, your name, your fortune and position, with the experience you have acquired in your numerous travels, in fact with all your excellent connections, you have never thought of taking up some serious occupation, — of entering, for instance, into public affairs?"

"In the first place," I replied to the minister, "I am far from possessing all the advantages you attribute to me; moreover, I have not the slightest ambition, and my idle life pleases me hugely."

"But your country?"

"What about my country?"

"Do you not owe it a few years, at least, of your existence?"

"And what would it do with such a gift?"

"Come, come, it is impossible that you deceive yourself to such an extent, be your modesty ever so great. You know full well that your success in the world would not be what it is, if you were not of special value. No man in society is less conspicuous, or more spoken of, than you. Unless you have a great historic French name, unless you are a great poet, a celebrated artist, or a great statesman, what is the hardest thing to acquire in society — you may rely on my extensive experience — is that indescribable something which causes people to turn

and look at you when your name is announced in a salon. Well, that is a privilege you enjoy; you are young, and yet you have influence, you have authority in the world, since people busy themselves very much about what you do and what you do not do."

These exaggerated flatteries were so transparent that I clearly saw that M. de Sérigny wished, if I may be pardoned the expression, to work upon my feelings to induce me as a point of honour to renounce my flirtation with Madame de V——. In spite of my sadness, this little comedy amused me, and I endeavoured to make it last as long as possible, by seeming to be caught by M. de Sérigny's praises.

"But," said I, with a modest smile, "admitting, monsieur, that which is merely, I believe, a delusion of your kind nature; admitting, I say, that I have had some success in the world, and that, relatively to my years, I am even considered of some account, I do not well see what use my country could derive from these advantages."

"No one can inform you better than I," replied the minister, with awkward alacrity, which proved to me that he had expected this question. "People talk a great deal, make a great fuss, over what is called diplomacy. Now do you know what the great art of diplomacy is?" he asked, with a good-natured smile.

I shook my head with an air of humility.

"Well, it is simply the art of pleasing. As diplomacy consists in asking and refusing, he who can please most will always gain his point; while if he is obliged to refuse, he will make his refusal sufficiently gracious, to avoid its wounding. Here lies the whole secret."

I had some difficulty in suppressing a great inclination to laugh, for it struck me that the minister, jealous of my attentions to Madame de V——, was going to propose to attach me to a foreign embassy, so as to get rid of me.

This was doubtless the solution of this scene; but I found the situation so amusing that I determined not to terminate it abruptly.

"I thought," said I, "that the able negotiators of the most fertile epoch of great treaties and great diplomatic victories, I thought," I continued, "that such men as D'Avaux, Courtin, Estrade, Ruvigny, and Lyonne were possessed of other attributes than the simple talent of pleasing."

"If they did not possess the art of pleasing," said, with some embarrassment, M. de Sérigny, who seemed ignorant of the historic traditions of his special department like the true constitutional minister that he was,— "if they did not possess the art of pleasing, they made use of some other seduction."

"You are right," I rejoined, "they had gold without limit."

"You see, then," cried the minister, "it is always the same; only in modern society the art of pleasing has superseded the seduction by gold."

"In the first place, it is more economical," I said.

"And safer," he rejoined; "for all thrones are not representative. There are, God be praised! kings in Europe who are absolute kings, and walk without leading-strings. Well, these kings are men, and, in a word, are subject like men to sympathies and antipathies. Frequently, the ambassador that is sent to them, even if he possesses the greatest genius, the loftiest character, can obtain nothing for his court, — and why? Simply because he is not pleasing; while, on the contrary, a man of moderate ability will often obtain by the simple power of his manners, because he can please, he will obtain, I say, what the man of genius was not able to obtain."

"This is true, and your system facilitates matters, since men who please are much more plentiful than men of genius."

"Certainly! Therefore, I am convinced, firmly convinced, that you, for instance, supposing you wished to enter the diplomatic career, could be of the greatest service to France; for you not only possess the art of pleasing, your success in society attests it, but you have also solid and eminent qualities."

I was right in my surmises; the proposition which I had anticipated, without doubt, was about to follow the ringing of my praises. Wishing to lend myself with a good grace to the minister's whim, I replied with a semblance of modest and confused astonishment:

"How can you think so, — I, monsieur, I, enter so difficult a career? My ambition has never been crazy enough to aspire to such a future."

"Listen to me," said M. de Sérigny, with a serious and paternal air.

And he made the following disclosure, which seemed to me an abominable falsehood.

"Your father rendered me a great service." Here the diplomat paused and sighed heavily, then he raised his eyes to Heaven, repeating: "Yes, yes, a great service! I could not tell you, my dear M. de ——, how happy I would consider myself in being able to demonstrate to you, his son, all my gratitude, since unfortunately I was not able to give proof of it to himself."

"I was quite ignorant of this circumstance, which my father never mentioned to me."

"I can well believe it," exclaimed M. de Sérigny, "for I myself can give you no particulars on this subject. It concerns a third party, and honour demands my silence. I repeat it," he continued, "I have just found an opportunity to acknowledge your father's goodness, and to secure another worthy servant to my country, if, however, you are disposed to utilise the rare advantages with which you are gifted."

"But I have told you, monsieur, however much I might desire to enter your honourable career under such

happy auspices, I never could believe my merit equal to this ambition."

"Once again, you do not know yourself, or you do not wish to know yourself," resumed the minister with some degree of impatience, "and fortunately your opinion in this matter is not of consequence. As to me, it is quite evident that, if you wish it, you can fill an important mission; for you must feel that you are not one of those young beaux, who, having nothing but their name and their fortune, esteem themselves very happy when they are appointed attachés to foreign embassies. No, no, such proposals are not made to such as you. You must enter by the wide door; you must, above all, have the opportunity to show your full value. Unfortunately, with us," he added, hesitatingly, "with us, the necessities, the traditions, of government are so imperative, that European missions are very much restricted, and at the present moment they are all filled."

I looked straight at M. de Sérigny. It took all my command over myself not to burst out laughing. From the turn his proposal had taken, it no longer seemed a question of exile, but of transportation.

"But you must be aware," said I, preserving my composure, "that, in the event of this conversation having any sequence, I have not the ridiculous pretension to aim at one bound at a European mission."

"You must understand one thing," continued the minister, with ever increasing satisfaction, "missions are more or less important just as you make them. There are some very insignificant ones in Europe, while there are some vastly important ones in Asia, for instance. It cannot be disguised that it is not in Europe, but in the Orient, that the fate of Europe will in future be decided. The future policy of Europe is in the East! Europe has her eyes fixed on the East! There is the field of battle where the great negotiators of our times must be formed! For instance," said M. de Sérigny,

looking steadily at me, "at this very moment I would like to find a man of good birth, with a keen, subtle intelligence, agreeable manners, and firm, resolute character, to whom I could entrust one of the most delicate missions. It is a question of securing the good-will and support of an important Oriental power, without arousing the suspicions, the susceptible jealousies, of Russia and England, our eternal rivals in the East."

"This mission, in fact, seems to me of great importance," I said, with the most disinterested air in the world.

"Is it not? Well, I may almost venture to say that I could secure that legation for you, so great is my confidence in your capacity, so much have I at heart to make some return for your father's kindness."

"Such a mission, to me!" I exclaimed, feigning the utmost astonishment.

M. de Sérigny assumed a deep, mysterious air, and said:

"M. de ——, I am speaking to a man of honour; whether or not you accept the proposition I have just made, will you give me your word that all this will remain secret between us?"

"I give you my word, monsieur."

"Well," he continued, not less mysteriously, "under the frivolous pretext of carrying rich gifts from his Majesty, the King of France, to the Shah of Persia, the object is to skilfully, adroitly, and forcibly gain the ascendency over the mind of that Asiatic prince so as to dispose him to accept favourably, at some later date, overtures of considerable importance which would hereafter be communicated to the envoy charged with this weighty negotiation. These interests, I will allow, are of the highest consequence. The gifts are ready, the instructions are drawn up, the vessel awaits, — and it is expected you should leave without delay."

My suppressed merriment was at its height, on hear-

ing the minister propose to me seriously to start off immediately in order that I might exercise my powers of pleasing on the Shah of Persia, to further a mission of the most absurd insignificance, in spite of M. de Sérigny's efforts to make it appear of vast importance.

The minister waited for my reply with unconcealed anxiety.

I felt a certain remorse at making a man of his age and position play so foolish a part, and at prolonging this comedy.

This proposition, unacceptable as it was, had aroused in me certain slumbering ideas. Unhappy in my love for Madame de Fersen, realising that it would be impossible for me, for some time at least, to entertain another affection, and dreading inactivity above all, I determined to utilise, if possible, M. de Sérigny's good-will.

"Monsieur," I said, "although the difference in our ages is great, will you permit me, in my turn, to speak to you with the fullest, I might say with the most brutal, freedom?"

"Certainly," said the minister, greatly astonished.

"If the praiseworthy and generous motives that you have set forth, monsieur, indicate your firm intention to try me in the diplomatic career, I trust you will not take exception at my endeavouring to give you a proof of the extent of my penetration?"

"What do you mean, monsieur?"

"Let us speak freely, M. de Sérigny: you are in love with a charming woman that we both know; my attentions to her annoy you, and you propose to get me out of the way by sending me to the Shah of Persia!"

"Monsieur!" cried the minister, in an offended tone.

"Permit me to continue," said I. "There is no need of my leaving to reassure you. I give you my word of honour that my intercourse with the lady of whom I

have the honour to speak is simply of a friendly nature, and, with the exception of an innocent and trifling flirtation, nothing can justify your suspicions."

M. de Sérigny appeared at first greatly irritated; nevertheless he said, with a forced smile: "After what has passed between us, it is inevitable either that we cut each other's throat, or become fast friends."

"Your choice is mine, monsieur."

"My choice is made," said M. de Sérigny, holding out his hand.

There was so much cordiality in his movement, he exercised so great a self-control to drive back his proud susceptibility and wounded self-love in the presence of a man of my years, that, deeply touched by his action, I said:

"If you believe all the good you have said of me, monsieur, you will attach no importance to this conversation. Attribute only to your high reputation for wisdom my earnest desire to demonstrate that I could penetrate your views. Pardon me for being so foolishly proud of my victory, for it was very flattering to me. As to fancying myself your rival with a certain charming person, my word must have reassured you regarding the past and the present. As to the future, there is one infallible way of setting aside your suspicions, — it is by asking a favour of you. Bound to you by gratitude, I would be base indeed were I to endanger your happiness in the slightest degree."

After a few moments of silence, M. de Sérigny said to me, with infinite good nature: "You speak so frankly, that it is impossible, I see, to hide one's meaning; one must deny all, or acknowledge all, and I prefer the last, for you are a man of honour, and very safe. All the same, it is very odd. Here am I, a man of my age, confiding my *amourettes* to a young man who has been very wittily making fun of me, and has said so to my face, and has so embarrassed me by confiding to me not

his, but my love affairs, that I find myself in the most absurd position possible. Fortunately, you tell me that I may in some way do you a good turn, which saves me from being absolutely ridiculous," he added, with perfect graciousness.

"Well then, monsieur, here is the point in question: although I do not consider my qualifications sufficient to bewitch the Shah of Persia — "

"Let us say no more about that!" gaily said M. de Sérigny. "You strike a foe when he is down."

"I will confess your proposal has aroused in me, not ambition, but a desire to become acquainted with political matters, that I may see if my mind could some day turn. I do not know whether you find in me now the same qualifications."

"Ah, M. le comte, M. le comte!" said M. de Sérigny, shaking his finger at me menacingly.

"Admitting it then, all that I would ask of your kindness would be that, in the event of your needing hereafter a private secretary, you will admit me for a few hours each day in your study. In this capacity, I will place myself entirely at your service, and you may entrust me with such papers as you think you may hand to a safe, trustworthy man. After this trial, I shall really know whether I have any aptitude for business; and later, if I thought I could fill successfully a modest diplomatic mission, I would then remind you of the debt you still owe my father."

"Another epigram!" said M. de Sérigny; "but what matters! And really now, do these tiresome duties not frighten you? Will you have the courage to come and work with me daily for three or four hours in my study?"

"I will have the courage."

"Perhaps you will not believe that your proposal comes most opportunely; and yet every one is aware that my private secretary has just been appointed to the

legation at Florence. I do not offer you the position, but I offer you the share he had in my work."

"And I accept with all my heart, and most gratefully." Touched by his kindness, and wishing to dispel the annoyance he might still feel at the advantage I had attained over him in this interview, I continued: "Look at the eccentricities of the human mind, and how by contrary ways one reaches the same end. You came to me with two very firmly set ideas: you wished to get out of your way a rival whom you feared, and to attach to the service of your country a man whose worth, you say, you discerned. I firmly declined your offers; and yet, not by the power of your will, but by mine, you obtain the desired end; for now I can no longer be a subject of jealousy to you, and I am going to share your work. After that," I exclaimed, "who will dare to say that I have tricked you? Come, come, M. de Sérigny, I am compelled to acknowledge that you are vastly above your reputation, and what I called my victory is no more than a fortunate defeat."

I made an appointment for the following day with the minister, and we parted.

CHAPTER XXI.

DIPLOMACY.

When M. de Sérigny had left me, I fell back into the bitter thoughts from which this interview had drawn me.

In spite of my efforts to drive away all thought of Madame de Fersen, I could not succeed. I suffered greatly, but my grief, though deep, had a certain charm which I had not previously known.

I was conscious of having conducted myself nobly towards Catherine, of not deserving her severe disapproval, and this comforting consciousness gave me a proud and courageous resignation.

I have always faced boldly the most cruel phases of my life. No hope was left to me of ever gaining Madame de Fersen's love. I therefore gathered religiously in my heart and memory the slightest traces of this ineffable love, as one gathers the sacred and precious remnants of a departed being, to come daily and contemplate them with dreamy sadness, and ask of them the melancholy charm of memory.

Not wishing, however, to be prostrated, and hoping to find some distraction in work, I went assiduously to M. de Sérigny's study.

He was truly an excellent man.

He showed himself full of kindness to me. Having doubtless assured himself of my scrupulous discretion, he soon gave me a flattering mark of his confidence in me, by entrusting me to make a clear and concise sum-

ming up of his diplomatic correspondence. This brief was to be handed daily to the king.

This work, it is true, appeared of much greater importance than it really was, since there was at that time no great political question pending in Europe. Almost all these despatches, written mostly in very faint ink, and very poor French, contained only vague and trifling particulars about foreign courts, particulars which had frequently even been discounted in the public print.

I convinced myself of that which I had always surmised, that in modern times, and with a representative government like ours, diplomacy which may be called current is almost nothing; the vital questions of nations are fought on fields of battle, in the Chambers, or in congresses.

Most of the time (I speak only of representative governments) diplomatic positions are mere sinecures which ministers use as a means of action or corruption, by disposing of them by political expediency.

I was all the more struck by the futility of the correspondence under my eyes, because my father had formerly made me almost go through a whole course of political law, and I had studied with him the most famous negotiators of the latter half of the seventeenth century. My great-great-grandfather having filled certain missions conjointly with Messieurs d'Avaux, de Lyonne, and Courtin, we had at Serval a duplicate of his despatches and theirs, and I must confess that the reading of these documents had made me very fastidious.

M. Sérigny himself was a man of second-rate ability; but he had enough tact, shrewdness, and perspicacity to enable him to respond to the modest requirements of his position. When he fought the Opposition in the Chambers, he could extinguish, drown, the most heated discussion with the clear flow of his abundant words, cold and monotonous as a waterfall.

From the constitutional point of view M. de Sérigny

could just as well have been Minister of Marine, of Justice, or of Finances as Minister of Foreign Affairs, but from the real, special point of view of these ministries, he was incapable of filling any.

I kept to myself my opinion of M. de Sérigny. He had been kind to me, and I was not Pommerive. Far from it, I defended my minister with all my might.

My duties amused me a good deal, for the very reason that their futility contrasted in a flagrant manner with their supposed importance.

The knowledge of these facts aroused in me charitable sentiments; I became very tolerant of that pitiless and affected self-importance, thanks to which most of our diplomatic agents always deceive the public on the value and the necessity of their position.

Without this prestige, they would cease to exist.

If I have never had the whim to become the associate or the dupe of a juggler, neither have I been malicious enough, when I fancied I had discovered his tricks, to proclaim it aloud, thus depriving the poor devil of his audience; for I never could picture to myself the future of a juggler deprived of his trade. I would, therefore, advise poor parents who destine their sons to a diplomatic career to be wise enough, to have sufficient foresight, to make them also learn some good solid trade which may some day be a useful resource should unexpected accidents deprive them of their first career.

This is not a brutal paradox. The essential specialty of our diplomats, consisting in worthily representing France, that is, in having a grand house and retinue at the expense of the state, in leading a luxurious, worldly, and amusing life, in receiving and writing insignificant despatches, it is difficult to imagine how these fine qualities could be employed when no longer exercising the profession which required them.

My new position with M. de Sérigny soon became known, and gave me singular authority in the world.

People knew that I had not sought a place, in devoting myself assiduously to the work on which I was engaged, and they naturally concluded that my apprenticeship must lead to high destinies.

Circumstances occurred which contributed to these exaggerated rumours.

It was at a ball at the Duchesse de Berri's.

M. de Sérigny was laid up with the gout, and therefore could not be present. Lord Stuart, the British ambassador, who had earnestly urged our government to take the most active steps to discover the pirate of Porquerolles, came up to tell me that they were on the tracks of the wretch, hoped soon to reach him, and asked me for further particulars of the affair. He took my arm, and we had a half-hour's talk in the recess of a window.

This was enough to make people believe that I was far advanced in what is benignantly called "secrets of state."

This was not all: about eleven o'clock I was going to leave the ball just at the moment the king was taking his departure.

I had had the honour to be presented to him; he stopped in front of me, and said, with his customary gracious affability:

"I read your reports every day. I am pleased with them, they interest me; they are very satisfying, and, thanks to you, I have the harvest without the trouble of reaping."

"The king overwhelms me," I said to his majesty, "and his approbation is a favour which imposes new duties; and I will endeavour to prove myself worthy of them."

Instead of leaving the ball, the king seated himself on a sofa near at hand, and said to me:

"But tell me, what is all this I hear from Lord Stuart? It is very extraordinary, and sounds like a romance."

When the king seated himself while speaking to me, the persons who accompanied him held themselves discreetly aside.

I related to the king the history of the pirate of Porquerolles; he listened with interest, put several questions to me, thanked me very graciously, and withdrew.

When the king had left, I became the centre of attraction; they could make nothing out of it. His majesty was leaving, he happens to meet me, and thereupon he remains a quarter of an hour in particular conversation with me.

Decidedly, I must be a man of the highest importance.

I know that nothing is more ridiculous than to appear to take pride in such a success, and I prepared to quit the ball, when I saw Madame de Fersen coming towards me. I had not seen her for some time, and she seemed so changed, so fallen away, that I was shocked.

I saluted her without waiting for her, and retired, though she looked entreatingly at me, and she was evidently coming towards me with the intention of speaking to me.

I

The next day I received a letter from her.

She begged me in touching terms to come and see her, apologising for her ingratitude, and making some gracious allusions to the past.

My first impulse was to go to Catherine at once.

I reflected, however, that this meeting was not likely to change the fate of my love. I remembered the harshness with which Madame de Fersen had behaved, and foolishly fancied my dignity required that I should not yield to the first advance.

I wrote a very cold and polite letter, apologising for not going to her as she requested, and said she could not fail to understand my reasons.

To this she made no answer.

I concluded that she had not a very great desire to see

me since she did not insist. I therefore congratulated myself on the course I had taken.

I soon heard that the prince had been called back to Russia by his court, and was surprised, I must confess, that his wife did not accompany him.

As to Madame de V——, I had implored her, for the sake of the friendship she professed for me, to cease tormenting so cruelly M. de Sérigny, declaring I would no longer lend myself to her coquettish manœuvres; that, moreover, she was compromising herself frightfully, and that sooner or later she would find herself ill-received in society.

She answered that I spoke like a Quaker, but for the joke of the thing she was going to live without a shade of coquetry.

One month after this glorious determination she came to express her gratitude to me, saying that, though this new life was deadly wearisome, it had made a tremendous sensation, and wagers were laid as to whether she would persist in her conversion or not. As to the minister, she said, since he had passed from the stupidity of jealous irritation to the stupidity of blind adoration, she neither gained nor lost in no longer tormenting him.

Consequently, the rumours which had been current about Madame de V—— and myself soon ceased, and I was accused of having deserted her.

I could not avoid smiling sometimes when I observed the obsequiousness of those around me, for I continued, as I may say, in sheer idleness my work at M. de Sérigny's.

Cernay, whom I sometimes met, concealed his envy under the semblance of the most exaggerated admiration. "You are a very able man," he said; "you should have, and you will have, all kinds of success. You are now a statesman, intimate with ministers and ambassa-

dors. The king even takes notice of you; you are considered, my good fellow, and you can have all you wish for, for you have such tact! if you will excuse the word, such cunning!"

"What do you mean?"

"Come, now, don't play the innocent. At that ball at the Tuileries, where you had in turn two interviews at once so remarkable and so much remarked, the one with Lord Stuart and the other with the king, who remained in conversation some time with you, instead of taking his departure in accordance with his expressed desire, what did you do, you shrewd fellow? Instead of doing as so many others who would have foolishly remained to strut after receiving such distinction, you quickly disappeared. That was shrewdness, or rather genius, and your absence created a prodigious effect."

"The cause of this disappearance was very simple, my dear De Cernay; I had a frightful headache, and wanted to get home."

"Nonsense," said Cernay, with charming naïveté; "you cannot make me believe that any one has the headache when the king has been talking with him for an hour."

A fortnight had passed since I had last met Madame de Fersen at the Tuileries ball, when one of my business agents came to me one morning with an air of consternation.

It was a question of preventing a disastrous failure, by which I might lose about fifty thousand dollars, which had been invested in one of the most esteemed business houses at Havre.

The failure had not yet been declared, but it was imminent, and was already suspected.

My agent therefore proposed that I should at once start with him, and go to rescue my funds from this house.

"'This is a letter from da princess.'"

The amount was so considerable, that I did not hesitate one moment about going to Havre.

A power of attorney, however wide its scope, could never provide for all the eventualities that might occur; under such circumstances, the presence of the interested party is often of the greatest consequence.

I wrote a few lines to M. de Sérigny, telling him that an affair of the greatest importance had called me to Havre, and I left orders with my people to forward my letters to that town.

Two hours later I was on the road.

We were approaching the last relay before reaching Havre, when I heard the hurried tramp of horses galloping behind us, the sharp cracking of a whip, and a voice not unknown to me crying out, "Stop! Stop!"

My postilions looked at me inquiringly. I made them a sign to stop, and, suddenly, I saw at the door of my carriage Madame de Fersen's courier, whose horse was covered with foam and torn by spurs.

This man was so breathless from his rapid race that he could only utter these words in handing me a letter:

"M. le comte, this is a letter from the princess. I have gained four hours upon M. le comte. I could do no more."

The letter just contained these words:

"My daughter is dying — is dying — and my sole hope is in you."

"You must turn back," I cried to the postilions, "return to the stage. And you," I said to the courier, "can you gallop all the way back to Paris, and have horses ready for me at the stages?"

"Certainly, M. le comte."

"Then mount, and be off."

The good fellow turned back at full speed on the road to Paris.

"But, monsieur," said my man of business, in dismay,

"you cannot go back to Paris; here we are just at Havre."

I looked at him in astonishment.

"Why not?"

"But this failure, monsieur," he exclaimed; "an hour may lose all, and fifty thousand dollars are at stake!"

I had entirely forgotten the purport of my journey.

"You are right," said I. "You are not more than a mile from Havre; oblige me by walking that distance, and arrange matters as best you can."

I had the carriage door opened.

"But, monsieur, once more, it is impossible," resumed the astounded man; "without you I can do nothing. I do not even have your power of attorney. Without you my presence is utterly useless. Come at least as far as Havre; we shall go to a notary, you will give me a power of attorney, and then — "

I was boiling with impatience. "Monsieur," said I, hastily, "you will go on to Havre without me, or you will return to Paris with me. The door is open; you can get down, or remain."

"But, monsieur — "

"Close the door, and off for Paris!" I exclaimed.

The agent at once left the carriage, saying to me, with an air of despair, "As you please, monsieur. I shall have nothing to reproach myself with. You may as well look upon these fifty thousand dollars as lost. Send me, at least, your power of attorney, registered, etc."

I did not hear the rest. The horses had started at full speed.

In my whole life, I had never travelled with such velocity.

At Versailles, I gave orders to stop in Paris a little way, before reaching Madame de Fersen's door.

When I arrived, I saw the street was strewn with straw.

Reflecting that I might possibly have to remain at Madame de Fersen's, and not wishing to have it known, I instructed my servant to take my carriage home, and tell my people that I had remained at Havre, and would return by the steamer.

I entered the mansion.

CHAPTER XXII.

IRENE.

THE slightest details of this dreadful scene are still present to my mind.

Midnight struck as I entered the antechamber of Madame de Fersen's apartment.

It was dark, and I found none of her people about. This seemed to me very strange. Led by a dim light, I crossed several rooms, only one of which was faintly lighted; my heart shrank with terror.

As I reached a half-open door, stifled sobs greeted my ear.

Noiselessly I pushed the door open.

Gracious heavens! what a picture!

Irene's cot, placed next to her mother's bed, occupied the end of the room facing the door.

Kneeling by the bedside, Catherine held one of the child's hands in hers.

I could not see the face of the unfortunate mother, only from time to time a sudden, convulsive movement shook her frame.

At the left side was Frank, the great painter, Hélène's husband.

Seated on a low chair, he sketched Irene's dying countenance.

A harrowing remembrance, which, no doubt, Madame de Fersen wished to preserve.

Frank, by means of a shade, had so arranged the lamp that the full light fell on Irene's face.

The rest of the apartment was plunged into almost total darkness.

A tall man, in a fur-lined coat, stood at the foot of the cot. His hair was white; his prominent bald forehead shone like old ivory; a ray of bright light brought out his sharply marked profile.

This was Doctor Ralph, Madame de Fersen's medical attendant.

He seemed watching with an anxious eye the slightest change in Irene's face.

In a dark corner of the room the nurse was seated, leaning her head against the wall, and scarcely able to smother her sobs.

As I entered, her sobbing became so uncontrollable that, holding her handkerchief to her mouth, she left the room.

I, also, was weeping bitterly at the sight of that angelic, childish face, so tender, so resigned, which, in spite of approaching death, preserved a character of sublime serenity.

Brilliantly lighted, her pale face stood out vividly against the white pillows; her beautiful black locks fell in disorder, covering her forehead; her large eyes half closed, and encircled by dark rings, showed under the heavy lids her half-extinct pupils. From her pretty half-open mouth, from her lips, formerly so roseate, and now so discoloured, came forth a panting breath, and often a feeble plaintive murmur. This poor little face, formerly so plump, so fresh and childlike, was already becoming livid.

From time to time the unhappy child moved her hands restlessly into space, or turned her head heavily on her pillows, with a deep sigh. Then she again became frightfully still.

Frank's face, which I had not seen for two years, wore an expression of heart-breaking sadness.

He, also, could not repress his tears every time he glanced at the face of the dying child.

The calmness, the silence of this scene, which I seized at one glance, made such an impression upon me that for an instant I stood rooted to the threshold.

Madame de Fersen turned towards the clock, then shook her head, with a gesture of despair.

I understood, she was beginning to lose faith in me.

I pushed the door open.

Catherine saw me; in an instant she was at my side, and drawing me to the cot, she said, in a heartrending tone, "Save her! have pity on me, and save her!"

Madame de Fersen's voice was low and broken; her beautiful face was tear-stained and worn; yet under this appearance of weakness one felt the superhuman energy which always sustains a mother, so long as her child needs her.

"One moment," said Doctor Ralph, in a low, solemn voice. "This is our last hope, let us not take too great a risk."

The unhappy woman hid her face in her hands.

"I have told you, madame," said the doctor, showing a vial containing a dark liquid, "this potion will restore this child to consciousness, will light up the faint spark of intelligence which still remains, perhaps. Then the sight of the person who exercises on her so strange an influence may work a miracle, for, alas! madame, nothing but a miracle can bring your child back to life."

"I know it, I know it," said Catherine, choking back her tears, "I am prepared for the worst. But, tell me, the potion, — what effect will it have?"

"I can answer for its immediate effects; but not for the consequences that may follow."

"What is to be done? *Mon Dieu!* what is to be done?" cried Catherine, in accents of anguish.

"Do not hesitate, madame," I said; "since all hope is gone, accept the only chance that remains!"

"I am of the same opinion, do not hesitate, madame," said Frank, who shared our emotion.

"Proceed, monsieur," whispered Madame de Fersen, in an accent of desperate determination; and she knelt down by her child's cot.

Her lips moved in prayer.

She, Frank, and I fixed upon the doctor sorrowing and apprehensive looks.

He alone was calm, as with slow and silent steps he approached Irene's bedside.

At the sight of his tall figure, his austere countenance, his long white hair, his peculiar garb, one might have supposed him a man gifted with some occult power, ready to perform by a potion some mysterious charm.

He poured into a golden spoon a few drops of the liquid contained in the vial.

Madame de Fersen took it, and approached the spoon to the child's lips.

But her hand trembled to such an extent that the liquid was spilled.

"I am afraid," said she, with a frightened look.

She gave back the spoon to the doctor. He filled it once more, and with a firm hand put it to Irene's lips.

The child swallowed it without reluctance.

It is impossible to express the intense alarm, the mortal anguish, with which we watched the effects of the potion.

The doctor himself, eagerly bending over the bed, watched Irene's face with anxious eyes.

Soon the potion began to work.

By degrees, Irene began moving her arms and hands, and her cheeks assumed a faint tinge of colour. Several times she quickly turned her head on her pillow, moaned piteously, closed her eyes, and then opened them.

The lamp was in front of her, and the bright light seemed painful, for she covered her eyes with her hands.

"She sees! she sees!" cried the doctor, with an alacrity that seemed to us of good omen.

"She is saved!" exclaimed Catherine, clasping her hands, as if in thanks to Heaven.

"No rash expectation, madame!" said Doctor Ralph, austerely and almost harshly. "I have already told you this semblance of life is deceptive. It is like galvanism which gives motion to a dead body, and a breath may snap the invisible cord which binds this child to life." Then, turning to me, he added: "It will be your turn, monsieur, presently to endeavour to strengthen that feeble thread. I solemnly declare, if that child lives, which, alas! I scarcely dare to hope, it is to you she will owe it, for known science does not work such miracles."

"God alone can work them," said Frank, in a solemn voice.

"Or certain mysterious and magnetic influences which one must concede without understanding them," added the doctor.

The stimulus of the potion upon Irene became more and more apparent. Two or three times she sighed deeply, held forth her arms, and then murmured, in a feeble voice: "Mother! Arthur!"

"Now," said the doctor, "take one of the child's hands in yours, monsieur, and let the other be in her mother's; come as close to her as possible, and call her, softly, slowly, so that the sound may have time to reach her feeble hearing."

I took hold of one of Irene's hands, her mother held the other.

Her hand was cold and moist.

I leaned over Irene. Her big eyes, looking still larger since her illness, wandered around as if in search of some one.

"Irene — Irene — I am here," I said, in a low voice.

"Irene — my child — your mother is here also," said

Catherine, with an accent of passionate and fearful anxiety impossible to describe.

At first the child did not seem to hear us.

"Irene — it is your friend — it is Arthur and your mother. Do you not hear her?"

"Your mother — *mon Dieu!* your mother is near you!" repeated Catherine.

This time the child's look no longer wandered. She moved her head suddenly, as if a sound from afar had reached her.

"How is her hand?" inquired the doctor, in a whisper.

"Still cold," I answered.

"Still cold," rejoined the mother.

"That is bad, you are not yet *en rapport*, — continue."

"Irene — dear child — angel — do you hear me? It is I — Arthur," I whispered.

Irene raised her eyes, and met mine fastened on her.

I had often heard magnetic attraction spoken of, and this time I experienced its action and reaction.

I fixed an eager and despairing glance upon Irene. By degrees, as if her eyes took life from mine, they lost their dullness, they became clear, bright, beaming with intelligence.

On her countenance, returning to life, I could follow the progress of her thoughts, of her awakening mind.

She threw out her arms, and an angelic smile lighted on her lips.

Too weak to raise her head, she sought her mother with her glance.

Catherine bent over the bed, still holding, as I did, one of Irene's hands.

After looking at us for a moment, the child gently brought together her mother's hand and mine; her eyes suffused with tears, and she wept freely.

When my hand touched Catherine's, my heart received an electric shock. For a moment I heard no more, I

saw no more. I held Catherine's and Irene's hands in mine, and became unconscious of the contact.

It seemed to me that a flood of electricity surrounded us, and blended us in one.

This impression was deep, inexplicable, almost painful. When I regained consciousness, I heard the doctor exclaiming, "She has shed tears! she is saved!"

"You have given her back to me," said Catherine, falling on her knees before me.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE GROVE.

This healing crisis saved Irene.

During the month of convalescence I left her neither by day nor by night.

In the early days of spring, Doctor Ralph urged Madame de Fersen to go to the country with her daughter, and recommended the vicinity of Fontainebleau.

Madame de Fersen having seen a very pretty cottage, called the Grove, had secured it, and the necessary repairs having been made, it was decided we should take up our residence there the first days of May.

If my continuous abode at Madame de Fersen's house had been known, it would have provoked the most odious comments. Consequently, the morning after the crisis, which had proved so favourable to Irene, I told her mother that she must forbid access to her apartment to every one, with the exception of the doctor, the nurse, and one of her maids, on whose discretion she could rely.

I had occupied during Irene's illness a vacant *entresol*, of which the windows opened on an uninhabited piece of ground, thus my return to Paris and my presence at Catherine's house was unknown to every one.

Madame de Fersen took to Fontainebleau only the same people who had been in attendance on her during her little girl's illness, the nurse and two maids. The rest of the household remained in Paris.

She asked me to follow her to the Grove in two days.

She took her departure.

The next morning I received from her most detailed instructions about finding my way to the small park gate at the Grove.

At the appointed hour I was at that gate; I knocked, and it was opened.

The sun was about setting, but it still threw some warm rays across the green lacework and violet clusters of an arbour of *glycynia*, under which Catherine was waiting for me with Irene, whose hand she was holding.

Was it intentional, or was it mere chance? I know not, but like the day when for the first time I saw her on board the Russian frigate, Catherine wore a gauzy white gown and a lace head-dress ornamented with a spray of red geranium.

The trials through which she had passed had made her fall away, but she was still beautiful, and even more lovely than beautiful. Her figure, as heretofore, was elegant and stately; her countenance noble, gracious, and pensive; her large, soft eyes of a perfect blue were fringed with long, dark lashes; the heavy tresses of her jet black hair framed her brow, lofty and sad, and her face paled by sorrow.

Irene, like her mother, was dressed in white; her long dark hair was tied with ribbons and fell to her waist, and her lovely face, though still pensive and sad, showed scarcely any traces of her recent sufferings.

Catherine's first impulse was to take her child in her arms, and, placing her in mine, she said, with great emotion, "Is she not now your Irene also?"

And amid her tears her eyes shone with joy and gratitude.

There are emotions which one cannot attempt to describe, for they are as vast as the infinite.

This first outburst of happiness passed, Madame de Fersen said to me, "Now I must show you to your apartment.

I offered Catherine my arm, Irene took my hand, and allowed them to lead me.

For some time we kept silent.

After following a long avenue, rapidly becoming dark as the sun sank below the horizon, we came to a clearing on the outskirts of the wood.

"Here is your cottage," said Madame de Fersen.

My cottage was a sort of Swiss chalet, half hidden in a mass of pink acacias, of linden-trees and lilacs. It was built on the edge of a small lake, on a foundation of great boulders of that flinty rock found in the neighbourhood of Fontainebleau. This structure having been erected as a point of observation, every advantage had been taken to make the most of its charming position.

A thick carpet of periwinkles, of ivy, of moss, and wild strawberry covered almost entirely the whitish rocks, and from each cranny sprouted a tuft of iris, of rhododendron, or heather.

On the other side of the lake a beautiful lawn, surrounded by the woods, rose in a gentle incline up to the front of the house occupied by Madame de Fersen, and which might be seen from a distance.

The sight was limited on all sides by a ring of verdure, formed by the thick woods surrounding the high walls of the park, and hiding them completely.

One might have wished more variety in the prospect; but as our life at the Grove was to be surrounded by the most profound mystery, this extensive and impenetrable barrier of leafage was very precious.

After a few minutes we reached the foot of the steps leading to the cottage. Madame de Fersen drew a small key from her belt and opened the front door.

At a glance I saw that she had been the presiding

genius in the arrangement of the two rooms. Everything was of excessive but elegant simplicity. I found flowers on every side; also a piano, a painter's easel, and some books which she had heard me mention as my favourites.

Pointing out to me an ebony cabinet frame with doors richly inlaid with mother-of-pearl, Madame de Fersen asked me to open it. On one side I found the exquisite sketch which Frank had made of the dying Irene, and on the other side a recent portrait of Irene also painted by Frank.

I took Catherine's hand and carried it to my lips, with a feeling of inexpressible gratitude.

She herself pressed her hand to my lip with an impulse full of tenderness. She then turned and passionately embraced her child.

I closed the panel, still more touched by this mark of Catherine's remembrance, for I had expressed to her my views regarding portraits exposed to the gaze of all.

When we left the cottage, the purple and gold of the dying sun was mirrored in the bosom of the lake. The acacias were dropping their roseate and fragrant petals. No sound was heard; on all sides the horizon was bounded by dark masses of verdure; we found ourselves in the midst of the most profound solitude, the most peaceful, the most mysterious.

Impressed by the sight of this sad and touching picture, Catherine leaned on the balcony of the chalet, and remained a few minutes plunged in reverie.

Irene sat at her feet, and began to gather roses and honeysuckle to make a bouquet.

I leaned against the door, and could not help feeling a pang of anguish as I looked upon Madame de Fersen.

I was going to pass long days near this woman, so passionately loved, and delicacy forbade my speaking one word of this deep and ardent love, which circumstances recently had combined to increase.

I knew not if I was beloved, or, rather, I despaired of being loved; it seemed to me that fate, which had brought Madame de Fersen and me together, by the death-bed of her child, during a month of terrible anguish, had been too tragic to end in so tender a sentiment.

I was absorbed in these sad thoughts, when Madame de Fersen made a quick movement, as if she were aroused from a dream, and said to me, "Pardon me, but it is so long since I breathed air so fragrant and invigorating that I selfishly enjoy this lovely nature.

Irene divided her bouquet in two, gave one half to her mother, the other to me, and we then started towards the house.

We reached it after a long walk, for the park was very extensive.

CHAPTER XXIV.

DAYS OF SUNSHINE.

THE GROVE, 10th May, 18—.[1]

IT is eleven o'clock; I have just left Madame de Fersen. Here am I in the chalet, which, henceforward, I am to occupy near her!

I experience a strange emotion.

Events have succeeded each other with such rapidity, my heart has been torn by such conflicting passions, that I feel the necessity of reviewing my memories, my desires, and my hopes.

I therefore resume my journal, interrupted after my departure from Khios.

My thoughts press so confusedly upon my brain that I hope to clear them by writing. I act like those who, unable to make a mental calculation, are obliged to have recourse to pencil and paper.

What for me will be the end of this love? Doctor Ralph has formally declared to Madame de Fersen that, for a long time yet, my presence is indispensable to Irene's perfect recovery, and that, for two or three months longer, it was absolutely necessary to soothe the child's imagination, and not give her the slightest shock or the least sorrow, these emotions being the more

[1] Arthur, according to his custom, introduces here some fragments from his journal, interrupted after leaving Khios, and, doubtless, resumed on his arrival at the Grove. The preceding chapters are intended to fill the gap separating the two periods, during which time Arthur appears to have neglected to keep his memorandum.

dangerous for her in that they were so profoundly concentrated.

Doctor Ralph attributes the attraction which I have for Irene to magnetic and mysterious affinities and he cites many examples, both among human beings and animals. He is unable, however, to offer any explanation of this. As I said, this attraction places me in a singular position.

The effect of my presence or absence upon this child is a proven and undeniable fact. For the past year Irene has had three or four attacks, sometimes slight, others serious and almost fatal, whose sole origin was her grief at not seeing me, and, above all, at not seeing me near her mother; for the nurse has since told me that even our meetings at the Tuileries did not quite satisfy Irene, who pined for the time spent on board the frigate.

My presence, therefore, is, one may say, the tie that binds Irene to life.

Were it not for my love, my passion for Catherine, were it not for the deep interest her child inspires in me, this imperious obligation to remain ever at Irene's side would be both painful and embarrassing.

But I worship her mother! When I compare other passions which I have experienced to that which she inspires, I find this the truest of all; and, seeing her daily, brought near her by the most startling and mysterious circumstances, most apt to bring the most passive love to a point of exaltation, I still must be silent; Catherine for me must be sacred as a sister, as a friend!

Can I, in the name of my past devotedness, in the name of the fatal influence I exercise over Irene, approach Catherine, professing my love, and expressing my hopes?

It would be base, it would be despicable.

And if the unhappy mother were to think — oh,

Heaven! — that I demanded her love as the price for my presence near her child!

Ah, this thought is horrible!

My resolution is taken, irrevocably taken.

Never shall a word of love pass my lips.

THE GROVE, 11th May, 18—.

My best deeds bring me bad luck, — one reason the more for keeping silent.

This morning the newspapers were brought in.

Madame de Fersen opened one, and began to read.

All at once she ceased to read, I saw her shiver and blush deeply; then, with an expression of dumb surprise, lowering her hands to her knees, she shook her head, as if she were saying, "Is this really possible!"

Looking at me with eyes filled with tears, she quickly rose, and left the room.

Not knowing what might have caused this keen emotion, I picked up the newspaper, and the following lines soon explained to me Madame de Fersen's dismay.

"It is well known that a month ago the firm —— & Co. failed for a sum amounting to several millions. The head of the firm secretly embarked for the United States. A few creditors, warned by alarming rumours as to the solvency of the firm, were in time to withdraw a portion of their funds. M. Dumont, business agent of M. le Comte de ——, involved in this bankruptcy to the amount of one hundred and fifty thousand francs, has not been equally fortunate; although he had come to Havre to ward off this disaster, he was not provided with the necessary papers, and as the bankruptcy was considered fraudulent, he laid his complaint before the district attorney, but in view of the assets amounting to scarcely eighty thousand francs, the numerous creditors of the firm —— must look upon their funds as lost."

Madame de Fersen knew of my hurried departure for Havre, for her courier had overtaken me before I reached that town. I had returned immediately, and the date of my return coincided with that of the bankruptcy. It was therefore evident to Catherine that my eagerness to return to the dying Irene was the sole cause of the severe loss I had sustained. Thus now, more than ever, should I appear to demand a reward for my sacrifices.

While mechanically skimming the newspaper, beneath the article which I have quoted, I came upon the following paragraph, which also concerned me.

The paper which I was reading was a semi-official journal, and might be considered well-informed.

"Many changes are imminent in our *corps diplomatique*. Among those mentioned as likely to be called to a prominent position in foreign affairs is M. le Comte Arthur de ——, who, though still young, has strong claims to this favour on account of his travels, his researches, and the conscientious work to which he has devoted himself for some time past, as chief secretary of his Excellency the Minister of Foreign Affairs. These particulars, for whose accuracy we can vouch, prove clearly that when high birth and the advantages of fortune accompany an eminent and recognised capacity, everything may be expected from the favours of the king's ministry."

This article evidently emanated from the office of M. de Sérigny, who thought, perhaps, that it would give me pleasure if, during my absence, he asked the king some favour for me.

I must confess, this piece of news left me indifferent, and I went in search of Catherine.

I found her in an avenue of the park.

"I know all," she said, holding out her hand. "Another sacrifice," she continued, raising her eyes to heaven. "And I, what have I done for him?"

These words went to my heart, and produced so great, so sweet an emotion, that, in spite of myself, my hopes once more were aroused, but, controlling my thoughts, and wishing to change the subject, I said:

"Do you not congratulate me on my future successes?"

She looked at me in amazement.

"What successes?"

"Have you not read to-day's paper?"

"Yes, I have. But of what success are you speaking?"

"They say in this paper that very soon I shall be called to a very important position at the Foreign Office."

Catherine, without appearing to have heard me, replied:

"Will you make me a promise?"

"What is it?"

"I shall send Irene to you to the chalet, but I do not wish to see you to-day. You will not be vexed with me?" she said, sadly, to me, holding out her hand.

"No, certainly not," I said, much surprised, however, at this sudden determination.

THE GROVE, 13th May, 18—.

How long is it since this journal was interrupted? I know not. I cannot remember.

Besides, what do I know now? What do I remember?

All that has happened, is it not a dream, a dream so dazzling that I ask myself where is the limit of reality? Where ends the dream? Where commences the awakening?

Dream, memory, awakening! These are vain words, and faded, which I used before this day.

I wish now for new words to describe what I had never before felt.

Not only does it seem to me impossible to use the

words of other days to describe my feelings of to-day, it seems to me a blasphemy, a profanation.

Am I not the dupe of a delusion? Is it I, my own self, who is writing this at the Grove, in the chalet?

Yes, yes, it is my own self. I am looking at the clock which points to the hour of five. I see the lake reflecting the rays of the sun. I hear the trees rustling in the breeze. I scent the fragrance of the flowers, and in the distance I see her dwelling, — hers.

It is not, then, a dream?

Let me see, let me gather my thoughts, let me go back step by step to the source of that torrent of happiness which intoxicates me.

What day is this? I know not. Ah, yes, it is Sunday. She went to mass this morning, and there she wept, she wept abundantly.

Blessed be those precious tears!

But when did we receive those papers? Ah, here they are, — it was the day before yesterday.

The day before yesterday! 'Tis strange! If years had passed since that day it would not seem to me further away!

Between the past of yesterday, which was almost indifferent to us, and the present to-day, which is all in all to us, is there not the distance of centuries?

Yes, it was the day before yesterday that Catherine begged me to leave her to herself.

I obeyed her wishes, but felt very sad.

Irene came to play on the steps of the chalet.

The dinner bell sounded.

Instead of appearing at table, as usual, Catherine sent word begging me to dine by myself, for she was suffering.

In the evening the air was sultry. Catherine came down to the parlours. I found her looking very pale.

"I am stifling," she said, "I am restless, nervous, agitated, the weather is so stormy."

She then asked me to give her my arm, as she was going to walk in the park. Contrary to her custom, she requested Madame Paul, Irene's nurse, to follow us with the little girl.

We followed the winding avenue of the woods, and soon came upon the arbour, covered with *glycynia*, where she had waited for me with Irene the first day of my arrival at the Grove.

I know not whether it was emotion, or fatigue, or indisposition, but Catherine complained of feeling tired, and seated herself on a bench.

The sun had just set; the sky was covered with clouds, gilded by the last rays of the sun. Almost continuously the entire hemisphere was illumined with vivid flashes of summer lightning, which Irene watched with a curious and tranquil air.

Catherine did not speak, and seemed deeply absorbed.

Twilight had begun to darken the woods, when Irene, who was resting on her nurse's lap, fell asleep.

"Madame," said Madame Paul, "Mlle. Irene is falling asleep, and the doctor was very particular that she should not be exposed to the damp evening air."

"Let us go home," said Catherine, as she rose.

She felt so weak that she leaned on my arm with her whole weight.

We walked a few steps, but very slowly; Madame Paul was in front with Irene.

Suddenly I felt Catherine giving way, and she said, in a broken voice, "I cannot take another step, I am prostrated."

"Just make an effort," I said to her, "to reach the chalet, which is close at hand, and you can rest on the bench at the door."

"But, Irene!" she exclaimed, anxiously.

A turn in the road hid the nurse, who was already some way in advance.

I supported Catherine, and a few seconds later she was seated at the entrance of the chalet.

The threatening clouds had dispersed; at our feet we saw the lake reflecting the stars as they made their appearance; the perfume of flowers, rendered more acute by the warm and sultry weather, permeated the atmosphere; there was not a breath of air, not a sound.

The night was so soft, so balmy and clear, that in the uncertain light I could perfectly distinguish Catherine's features. My whole being seemed concentrated in my heart, which was beating violently.

Like Catherine, I felt overpowered, unnerved, by the warm, perfumed air which surrounded us.

Madame de Fersen was seated, resting on cushions, her head leaning on her hands.

The calm was so intense that I could hear Catherine's panting breath. I fell into a deep reverie, at once sad and blissful.

Never, perhaps, would I have a more favourable opportunity to unbosom myself to Catherine; but my scruples, and the dread of seeming to ask reward for a service rendered, kept me silent.

Suddenly she exclaimed:

"I implore you, do not leave me to my thoughts; let me hear your voice. Tell me all you wish, but speak to me; in the name of Heaven, speak to me!"

"What shall I say?" I replied, submissively.

"What matters!" she cried, clasping her hands in supplication; "what matters! only speak to me, drive from me the thoughts which possess me, have pity, or, rather, be pitiless, — accuse me, overwhelm me, tell me I am a thankless, selfish woman, base enough not to have the courage to be grateful," she continued, with increasing excitement, as if a secret long suppressed was now escaping her. "Do not soften your reproaches, for you cannot tell how deeply your resignation wounds me, you cannot tell how I long to find you less gen-

erous. For what can be said of a woman who meets a true, discreet friend, and for six months permits him to surround her with the most delicate, most assiduous, and respectful attentions, sees him devote himself to the least whims of her poor, suffering child, and who, one day, in all thanklessness, and for the idlest and most puerile of motives, coldly dismisses this friend? And this is not all. When this woman, in a terrible dilemma, again has need of him, — for she knows he alone can save her child's life, — she forthwith recalls him, well aware that she can demand everything from the self-denial of this brave heart; and he, sacrificing all, instantly returns to draw this child from the very jaws of death!"

"Hold, I pray you! Let us not recall these sad memories, let us only think of our present happiness," said I.

But Catherine appeared not to hear me, and continued with an ever increasing excitement which alarmed me:

"This friend, so good, so noble, has he ever attempted by a single word to speak of his admirable conduct? He has been the protecting genius of this woman and her child when both were suffering; and when he has saved them, — for to save the child is to save the mother, — he goes, proudly, silent, and reserved, happy doubtless in the good he has done, but seeming to fear the thanklessness or disdain the gratitude he has inspired."

Catherine's voice was growing more and more broken and gasping. I was almost frenzied by her words, but they seemed to me drawn from her by feverish excitation, and contrasted so forcibly with her habitual reserve that I feared her reason, until now so strong and clear, had yielded to the tardy reaction of the terrible experiences which had shaken her for the past six weeks.

"Catherine, Catherine!" I exclaimed. "You are too passionately devoted to your child for me ever to have

doubted of your gratitude, — my dearest, most precious reward."

Catherine heard my reply, for she alluded to my words as she continued in a still more passionate accent:

"Oh, yes, yes; tell me, then, that the intoxicating, invincible sentiment that invades me at this moment is gratitude; tell me that nothing is more sacred, more holy and legitimate, than what I feel. A woman has certainly the right to devote her life to him who has restored her child to her, more especially when he, as generous as he is considerate, has never attempted to say one word of his hopes; therefore, is it not for her — for her — to come to him, and ask with joy, with pride, How can I ever reward so much love?"

"By returning it!" I exclaimed.

"By confessing that I have always returned it," said Catherine, in a subdued voice.

And her hands languorously fell into mine.

THE GROVE, 16th May, 18—.

Woe! Woe!

Since yesterday I have not seen her. Doctor Ralph arrived last night. He found her in great danger. He attributed this devouring fever, this terrible delirium, to reaction from the anguish which the unfortunate woman had repressed during her child's illness.

He does not know all.

Ah, her remorse must be terrible! How she must suffer, and I am not there, by her side, — and I cannot be there.

Ah, yes, I love her, I love her with all my strength. This intoxicating memory, which yesterday made me almost frenzied with love, to-day I curse it!

The sight of Irene hurts me. This morning the child came towards me, and I repulsed her. She is fateful to her mother, as, perhaps, she will be fateful to myself.

Doctor Ralph has just left me; there is no change for the better.

I observed a strange difference in him. This morning, on his arrival, he gave me his hand as usual cordially; the austere expression of his face generally assumed a look of benevolence on meeting me. This evening I gave him my hand, he did not grasp it. His glance seemed to me severe, interrogative. After having briefly informed me of the state of Catherine's health, he coldly left the room.

Can Catherine have betrayed herself in the wanderings of fever?

This thought is dreadful. Happily, there is near her no one but Irene's nurse and Doctor Ralph.

But what matter! what matter! This nurse is only a servant, and this doctor is but a stranger! And is she, so proud, because heretofore she had a right to be so, condemned henceforth to blush before these people!

If she has spoken, she is not aware of it, perhaps may never know it, but they know it, they, perhaps, have her secret and mine.

If with a word one could annihilate two persons at once, I believe I would utter that word.

THE GROVE, 17th May, 18—.

What is to be done, what will become of us, if Catherine so rapidly gets worse? Doctor Ralph will no longer take the sole responsibility, he will call in some consulting physicians, and then —

I cannot continue to write, my sobs stifle me.

This morning something very strange happened.

When the doctor announced to me that Catherine was worse, I came back here in the chalet; I wished to write down what I felt, for I cannot and will not confide to any one my joys and sorrows; so, when my heart

overflows with grief or happiness, it is a great relief to me silently to confide to this journal.

When I heard of Catherine's renewed danger, my sufferings were so great that I wished to write, that is, to pour out my anguish.

This was impossible. I could only trace with a trembling hand the few lines at the head of this page, but was soon interrupted by my tears.

Then I went out into the park.

There, for the first time, I regretted — oh, bitterly regretted — that I possessed neither religious faith nor hope.

I might have prayed for Catherine.

There is certainly nothing more heartrending than to recognise the utter futility of addressing prayers to Heaven for a beloved being whom you fear to lose. In prayer you have some minutes of hope, you are fulfilling a duty, your sorrow at least has a language, which you believe is not quite barren.

But not to be able to say to any human or superhuman power, "Save her!" It is terrible.

I so painfully felt this helplessness, that in despair I fell on my knees, without having consciousness to whom my prayer was addressed. But firmly convinced, in that momentary hallucination, that my voice would be heard, I cried aloud: "Save her! Save her!" Then, in spite of myself, I experienced a glimmer of hope, I felt the consciousness of a duty fulfilled.

Later I blushed for what I called my weakness, my puerility.

Since my mind could not grasp, could not believe, the assertions which constitute the various human religions, what God was I imploring?

What power had succeeded in tearing from me this prayer, this last cry, this the last utterance of despair?

The crisis which the doctor feared did not take place.

Catherine is no better, but she is not worse, and yet her delirium continues.

Doctor Ralph's coldness towards me is still excessive.

Since her mother's illness, Irene has given frequent proofs of tenderness and feeling, which, though childlike, are serious and resolute like her character.

This morning she said to me: "My mother suffers very much, does she not?"

"Very much, my poor Irene."

"When a child is suffering, her mother comes to suffer in her stead, so that the little one may not suffer any more, is it not so?" she inquired, gravely.

Astonished at this reasoning, I looked at her attentively without replying. She continued:

"I wish to suffer in my mother's place, take me to the doctor."

This childish trait, which, under other circumstances, would have made me smile, gave me a heart pang, and I kissed Irene to conceal my tears.

THE GROVE, 17th May, 18—.

There is hope; the delirium ceases; an alarming prostration has followed. Doctor Ralph dreaded the heat of her fevered blood. Now he fears excessive languor, heart failure.

Her consciousness has returned. Her first utterance was her child's name.

The nurse told me that the doctor had not yet allowed Irene to go near her mother.

Twenty times have I been on the point of asking Madame Paul if Catherine had inquired after me, but I dared not.

THE GROVE, 18th May, 18—.

To-day, for the first time, Doctor Ralph permitted the nurse to take Irene to her mother.

I waited with anxious and irritable impatience for the

moment when I would see Irene, hoping from her to have some particulars about her mother, perhaps a word, a remembrance, from Catherine.

Once returned to consciousness, I know not what course Madame de Fersen will take towards me.

During the paroxysm of remorseful despair which follows a first fault, a woman often hates the man to whom she has succumbed; she overwhelms him with reproaches as violent as her regrets, as vehement as her sorrow; it is on him alone the sole responsibility weighs for their guilt; she is not his accomplice, but his victim.

If her soul has remained pure, notwithstanding that for a moment she was involuntarily led astray, she takes the sincere resolution never again to see the man who has seduced her, and to have to weep over one sole betrayal, one sole defeat.

To this resolution she at first remains faithful.

See seeks, not to excuse, but to redeem her error, by the rigorous fulfilment of her duties; but the remembrance of her fault is there, ever there.

The more noble the heart, the more austere the conscience, so will the remorse be the more implacable. Then, alas! she suffers terribly, the poor creature, for she stands alone, and is compelled in secret to devour her tears, while to the world she still wears a smile.

Sometimes, again, she becomes frightened at her isolation, at that wordless concentration of her grief, and she resigns herself to ask for comfort and strength of the man who is the cause of her fall. She then implores him, for the sake of her remorse, to forget a moment of madness, and to be for her no more than the truest of friends, the confidant of the sorrows he has brought upon her. But, alas! almost always the unhappy woman has still more tears to shed.

Man, with the coarser instincts of his sex, does not realise the sublime struggle which woman endures between love and duty. The incessant torture, the menacing

terrors aroused in her by the remembrance of outraged religion and family honour, these dreadful tortures are treated by man as ridiculous whims, as childish scruples, or the absurd influence of the confessional.

If the struggle is prolonged, if the unhappy woman passes her life in efforts to conceal a sorrow caused by her dishonour, and valiantly resists the commission of a second fault, the man is irritated, and revolts against these pruderies which wound his self-love and his eager and brutal passion to the quick; for one last time he reviles her virtue, her sorrows, and her courage by saying to this miserable woman that her return to high principles is somewhat tardy. Frenzied by a base desire for revenge, he at once rushes with his cynical nature to make a notorious display of some other intrigue.

He has been loved, he is still beloved! A virtuous and beautiful woman has jeopardised, for his sake, her happiness, her future, and that of her children! while he basely recoils from the least sacrifice.

How comes it that this man is so worthless, and yet so worshipped? Because woman loves man more for the qualities she attributes to him, and with which her sensitive nature adorns him, than for those he really possesses.

If, on the contrary, by a rare exception, a man realises all that is saintly and beautiful in this remorse, if he endeavours to comfort the sorrow of which he is the origin, the woman's gentleness and resignation may prove for her another pitfall.

Catherine, — will she be pursued by incessant remorse?

Like those women who, from an insatiable yearning for sympathy, or, with the chastity of sorrow, conceal their woes, and make only a display of their joys, will Catherine leave me in ignorance of the anguish she suffers?

Knowing her as I do, I believe, after I have seen Irene, and gathered from her the substance of her conversation

with her mother, I shall be able to divine Catherine's sentiments towards me.

Hence I look forward with eager impatience to the child's visit.

Heaven be praised! I see her running, holding in her hand a bouquet of roses.

My heart did not deceive me; Catherine sends it to me.

She forgives me my happiness.

CHAPTER XXV.

A WOMAN IN POLITICS.

HERE come to an end the fragments of the journal I formerly wrote at the Grove.

During the four months which followed Catherine's confession of her love, and which we passed in this total isolation, my life was so engrossed by the delights of our ever growing love that I had neither time nor inclination to make a record of emotions so entrancing.

Catherine confessed to me that she had felt greatly attracted to me ever since our departure from Khios.

I asked her why she had treated me so harshly on one occasion, when she had requested me not to see her little girl any more. She answered that her despair at feeling herself at the mercy of the affection I inspired, added to her jealousy and grief when she saw me smitten by so giddy a woman as Madame de V——, had alone decided her to put an end to the mysterious intimacy of which Irene was the bond, however painful to her was this determination.

Later on, when she learned of the termination of my supposed intrigue with Madame de V——, and finding that absence, instead of diminishing, only increased the power I had gained over her, she endeavoured to renew our former relations. Moreover, Irene commenced to be seriously affected by my absence. "Love is so inexplicable in its contrasts and its sensitiveness," said Catherine to me, "that this very reason, added to your

seeming coldness and disdain, made me hesitate frankly to come to you, fearing that this step might have appeared to you simply dictated by my anxiety for my child's health.

"The condition of that poor child became so much worse that I resolved to conquer my timidity and tell you all at that ball at the Tuileries, but your greeting was so freezing, your departure so abrupt, that it became impossible for me. The next day I wrote to you; you did not answer. It was not, alas! until Irene's life was despaired of that I dared once more to write to you at Havre! God only knows with what admirable generosity you responded."

After the first bitterness of her remorse, Catherine's love for me became calm, dignified, almost serene.

One felt that, having exercised all her might to resist an unconquerable passion, this woman was prepared to endure with courageous resignation the consequences of her weakness.

The four months we spent at the Grove were for me, for her, the ideal of happiness.

But wherefore speak of happiness? This is now but Dead Sea ashes!

What matter, alas! Let me continue the sad task I have imposed upon myself.

When I was able to snatch some moments from the love which engrossed me, I wrote to M. de Sérigny to thank him for his good intentions towards me, which I had learned from the article in the official newspaper, and informed him that I would be absent for some months yet, that I was unable to disclose to him my place of abode, but begged him, in case any one inquired of him for me, to answer in such a way as might lead people to infer that I was in a foreign country.

In the month of September Catherine heard that

her husband would return towards the close of the year, and informed me that she intended returning to Paris.

Catherine's intention surprised and grieved me.

We had considerably discussed whether or not I should resume the duties I had taken upon me with M. de Sérigny.

Catherine had persistently urged me to do so.

I vainly represented to her that those hours devoted to uncongenial work would be stolen from our love, and that I should find very tedious an occupation which I had sought simply as a distraction to my grief. In vain I told her that all the correspondence with which I was entrusted treated of the most futile subjects, and in no way interested me.

To this she replied that at no distant period questions of the greatest importance would necessarily be discussed in high political spheres, and that I would then regret having abandoned that position. She felt so proud, so happy, of the distinction drawn upon me by the king's recognition of my merits, she said, she so gloried in my success, that I ended by promising to do as she wished.

It was therefore decided between us that I should resume my position with M. de Sérigny.

To avoid returning to Paris at the same time as Madame de Fersen, and in order that people might suppose I had been travelling for some time, I left the Grove for London, and came back to Paris, where I found Catherine on my arrival, after fourteen days' sojourn in London.

M. de Sérigny had ably fulfilled my wishes, and in society it was generally supposed that an important foreign mission had been the cause of my absence from home.

The minister seemed quite pleased at having me once more sharing his labours; for the king, he told me, had frequently inquired as to the period of my return, express-

ing his regret that the briefing of despatches was no longer made by me.

To the eyes of the world, I did not at first visit Madame de Fersen more assiduously than before our sojourn at the Grove; but little by little my visits became more frequent without being so noticeably.

My character as an ambitious man, wholly absorbed by state affairs, and Madame de Fersen's high reputation were too firmly established in public opinion for society, so constant to its routine habits, not to accept this situation; and appearances very contrary to these ideas would have been needed to make it change its point of view towards us.

The impenetrable mystery surrounding our love redoubled it.

I frequently regretted our radiant days at the Grove, — days so calmly happy, so peaceful, — but on the other hand, in Paris, when I exchanged with Catherine a tender glance, unperceived by all, I felt that joyful pride which one always experiences when in possession of a secret at once formidable and enticing, from which depends the honour, the existence, and the future of the woman beloved.

Some time before his departure, M. de Fersen had confided to me that his wife had become indifferent to political matters, which until then had engaged her attention to a great extent.

After returning to Paris I noticed, with astonishment, that Catherine by degrees resumed her former relations.

Her salon, where I visited assiduously, was, as formerly, the habitual meeting-place of the *corps diplomatique*. Before long, subjects which were spoken of daily became so serious that, with the exception of the ministers and some influential speakers of the two chambers, the elegant and frivolous French society disappeared almost entirely from the gatherings at Madame de Fersen's.

Although serious, these discussions had no true importance; either they rose so high as to become abstract and unpracticable theories, or they descended to such paltry and positive interests that they became frivolous and narrow.

The discussions were as infinite and barren as ever on this well-worn theme: "Would the Restoration resist or yield to democratic influence?" etc.

Catherine always surprised me by the subtlety of her intellect and the liberal tendencies of her convictions. One of her great triumphs was in demonstrating the advantages which France would derive by preferring the Russian to the English alliance. When I complimented her on this subject, she laughingly told me that I was France, and that the sole secret of her eloquence was that.

I might as well have answered that she was my diplomacy; for to please her I conquered my profound aversion to the European gossip of the diplomats who habitually met at her house, and I persevered with my work under M. de Sérigny. Perhaps, also, I remained in this position from a feeling of pride, which I would not acknowledge, and which, no doubt, the marked distinction with which the king honoured me had given rise to, as well as from the sort of importance which it gave me in the world. Thanks also to my duties, my assiduous presence at Madame de Fersen's might be attributed to purely political associations.

What charmed me in Catherine was, perhaps, less the influence which she possessed over those surrounding her, than the exquisite grace with which she renounced this highly esteemed influence with me. This woman, with a strong, lofty, even judicial mind, who was listened to with rare deference, whose least words were heard with respect, showed herself in our intimacy what she had been at the Grove, — kindly, simple, and gay, of an effusive tenderness, I might almost say of a submis-

sion full of grace and consideration, always placing her triumphs at my feet, and laughing with me at their conceit.

Then, for the sake of our love, I would implore her to abandon this life so uselessly employed.

On this subject alone, did I find Catherine ever intractable. She would set forth that M. de Fersen would return to Paris; that she had been guilty of a fault, a grave fault, and that she should at least atone for it by devoting herself to her husband's wishes. Before his departure he had bid her most expressly to maintain, and even to extend, the relations which she had established; and she was obeying his injunctions more to satisfy her conscience than for her own pleasure.

As much as I, she regretted the former conversations of the saloon on board the frigate, and, above all, the four months spent at the Grove: this period of the heart's paradise, as she called it, those priceless days which shine but once, and never return in life, — no more than youth returns.

There is nothing more exclusive, more madly absolute than passion. While acknowledging the truth of Catherine's observations, I could not avoid feeling wretched at these obligations imposed upon her by remorse for a fault which I had caused her to commit.

Catherine, however, showed herself so tender, so considerate! With an incredible tact, she found means to speak to me covertly of ourselves, even in the midst of apparently serious conversations, and thus won me to bear in patience the obstacles to our love.

There is nothing, in fact, so delightful as this conventional talk, by means of which lovers can speak of themselves, their hopes, and their memories, in the midst of the gravest company. Nothing amused me more than to see the most solemn men innocently taking part in our ambiguous conversations.

But these people often made me pay cruelly for these

mysterious joys. They robbed me almost entirely of Catherine's society of an evening, for they generally met at her house; and frequently of a morning a letter from one or the other, asking for an interview with Madame de Fersen, disarranged all our plans.

Catherine suffered from these obstacles as much as I, but how could it be avoided? Under what pretext could she refuse the request for an interview? I, who had carried to the most scrupulous sensitiveness the fear of compromising in the slightest degree her reputation, could I encourage her in so perilous a step?

No, certainly not; but I suffered cruelly from the thousand obstacles ever recurring which continually irritated the jealous impatience of my heart.

Our happiness at the Grove had been so perfect! Enchanting season, lovely country, complete isolation, mysterious and extreme freedom, everything had been so beautifully arranged by chance that the comparison of that past with the present was a continuous source of irritation.

These regrets did not prevent my enjoying the delightful moments that remained to us. I had perfect faith in Madame de Fersen's love; my attacks of distrust of myself and others yielded to the influence of her noble character, and the conviction that I had this time conducted myself towards Catherine as few men would have conducted themselves in my place, and that I, therefore, was deserving of all her tenderness.

I felt so sure of myself that I ventured on certain analytical thoughts which I would formerly have dreaded. In a word, I had fruitlessly sought the hidden motives of Madame de Fersen's love; and I confess that, seeing her high rank, her great influence, her wealth and position, I could not, in spite of my inventive shrewdness and the resources of my suspicious mind, I could not, I say, discover what interest Catherine could have in pretending to love me.

CHAPTER XXVI.

SOCIETY GOSSIP.

We were at the beginning of November, a Friday, ominous day for me.

For some time, Madame de Fersen, informed of her husband's approaching return, desirous of dispelling suspicion, had thought best to be at home at all times, and accessible to every one. Still, she had pledged herself to give me a few hours to myself.

Our private meetings had become so rare, so difficult to arrange, on account of the crowd which beset her, that we both attached great value to this day of happiness. Catherine had been preparing for some time for this blissful meeting by postponing or putting an end to a thousand trifling engagements which are like invisible fetters in which a woman of society, however free she may appear, is daily entangled. The previous evening, at tea-time, Catherine had renewed her promise, in the presence of her wonted circle, by telling me, in accordance with the understanding between us, that she hoped it would be fine weather for her walk on the morrow.

I remember that Baron de ——, a walking encyclopedia, thereupon opened a learned meteorologic and astronomic parenthesis, and a lively discussion ensued upon planetary influences and atmospheric causes.

Several times Catherine and I could scarcely suppress a smile, as we thought of the mysterious and bewitching cause which served as a basis for the learned lucubrations of so many wise people. We had to exer-

cise the greatest control over ourselves to refrain from laughing aloud at the excellent reasons the papal nuncio gave as a proof that the next day the weather would be splendid. I was so strongly of this opinion, that I wildly launched myself on his side, and between us we got the better of a devilish *chargé d'affaires* of the United States, who rabidly predicted, envious republican that he was, execrable weather.

I therefore left Catherine in a state of hopeful excitement, and as impatient as in the first days of our love.

It seemed to me that my love was greater this day than other days. I had a thousand golden dreams regarding this meeting, and my heart overflowed with love and hope.

That evening Catherine had seemed to me even more beautiful and witty. She had been more admired and more deferred to than usual; and, to our shame be it said, the praise or censure of the indifferent or envious invariably cause love to fluctuate between fervour and coldness.

The next morning I was on the point of leaving home, when I received a line from her. Our meeting could not take place. She had learned that a discussion of the highest importance, which had been supposed adjourned, was to take place that very day in the Chamber of Deputies, and that she was to go there with M. P. de B——, the Russian ambassador.

My regrets, my vexation, my anger and sorrow, were excessive.

The hour for the opening of the debate had not arrived, so I went at once to Madame de Fersen's.

The footman, instead of announcing me, told me that the princess had denied herself to every one, as she was then in conference with the Prussian minister.

If all the ancestors of the Marquis de Brandebourg had been in the drawing-room I would have entered. I therefore ordered the footman to announce me.

As a culmination to my despair, Catherine had never been more lovely, and my vexation, my ill-temper, increased still more.

She seemed amazed at my entrance, and the aged Comte de W—— was visibly annoyed, which, however, was quite immaterial to me.

He took his departure, saying to the princess that they would resume their conversation later.

"How miserable I am at this disappointment!" said Catherine, sadly, "but it is nearly one o'clock; the meeting begins at two, and our ambassador—"

"Eh, madame!" I exclaimed, interrupting her, and violently stamping my foot, "say no more about Chambers and ambassadors; it is a question of choosing between my love and the interests of countries to which you devote yourself. The connection is ridiculous, I admit, but your unreasonable ways provoke it."

Madame de Fersen gazed at me in profound and pained astonishment, for I had never accustomed her to such acrimonious methods.

I continued:

"I am moreover delighted to find this opportunity of telling you, once for all, that your parleys and continual verbiage with these tiresome and self-sufficient persons are very displeasing to me, and make me impatient beyond all expression. I never find you alone. You are for ever surrounded by these people, who find it very convenient to make your parlours an annex to their legations. I would infinitely prefer that you should be surrounded by a bevy of the most elegant and the wittiest young men, and that you showed yourself towards them as great a coquette as Madame de V——! At least I could be jealous of somebody, I could vie with some rival in attentions and tenderness for you. But here, against whom can I struggle? Whom shall I call to account?—the various nations? I declare to you that I find nothing more humiliating, more abject, than

being reduced to feel jealous of Europe, or to contest for the heart of the woman I love with orators in the Chambers, as I am doing this day."

"My dearest, are you speaking seriously?" said Madame de Fersen, with a timid, shrinking, and yet bantering uncertainty, which would have enraptured me if Catherine had been less desperately beautiful, and if certain vexations did not drive you senseless as well as wicked. Madame de Fersen's question, moreover, exasperated me, for it showed me that my exhibition of anger approached the comic.

"Loving hearts and generous minds divine the impressions, and do not question. If you are reduced to asking me what I feel, I pity you. As for me, I am more clear-sighted, and understand but too well that you no longer love me."

"I not love you!" exclaimed Madame de Fersen, clasping her hands in distressed amazement; then she repeated: "I not love you! You say that — to me?"

"If you loved me, you would for my sake sacrifice all this following which I detest, because it hampers me, because it is useless, because it warps your mind. If you loved me, you would sacrifice the gratification of your vanity to my happiness."

"The gratification of my vanity! It is then from vanity that I preserve, that I cultivate these relations! *Mon Dieu!* Must I then repeat to you, Arthur, what I never say without sorrow and shame? I have been guilty, let me, at least, do all I can not to aggravate my error."

"Now you are beginning with your remorse," said I, harshly; "a rupture is not far distant, but, let me tell you, you might be anticipated."

"Ah, what are you saying? It is dreadful, — have I deserved it?" cried Catherine, her eyes filling with tears.

"His Excellency the Russian ambassador," announced the footman.

Madame de Fersen had barely time to disappear behind the portière which concealed the door between the parlour and her bedchamber.

"I am, like you, waiting for Madame de Fersen," I said to M. P. de B——, "she is doubtless finishing her toilet. You are going to the Chambers, I believe?"

"Yes; it will be a most brilliant and interesting sitting; they say that Benjamin Constant, Foy, and Casimir Perier are going to speak, and that M. de Villèle will answer."

Catherine entered, calm and composed, as if nothing had passed between us.

Her control over herself angered me.

After a few unmeaning words M. P. de B—— remarked that it was getting late, and it was best to start at once in order to find places in the diplomatic gallery. He offered his arm to Madame de Fersen, who suggested that I should go with them, accompanying the proposal with an imploring glance to which I was insensible.

I left Madame de Fersen in a state of irritation, dissatisfied with her and with myself.

My carriage drove me to the Tuileries, where I got down for a walk.

By chance I met Pommerive.

I had not seen him since I left Paris in the spring.

I felt so sad, so gloomy, that I was not sorry to find some distraction for my thoughts.

"Where do you come from, M. de Pommerive?" I inquired.

"Don't speak of it! I have been for three months in Franche-Comté, at St. Prix, with the D'Aranceys. Don't speak of it, it is disgusting!"

"They are certainly rich enough to give you some of those excellent dinners you are so fond of, and for which you show yourself so grateful, M. de Pommerive."

"The only way to show one's gratitude for a good dinner is to eat it with pleasure," said the cynic. "I

don't complain of the table at D'Arancey's, they have first-rate fare. The father of D'Arancey has stolen enough by his contracts and otherwise; he has brought about enough fraudulent bankrupties to enable his son to display all that luxury. By the bye, do you know that he has as much right to call himself D'Arancey, as I have to call myself Jeroboam! His name is simply something like Polimard; now, this common, low name is not pleasing to this fine gentleman, so, by means of a slight change, skilfully substituting D'Aran for Poli, and cey for mard, he has changed the distinguished name of Polimard into D'Arancey. He likes that better. You may tell me that this bankrupt's son had no reason to cling to his name, since he had none at all, for he had never been acknowledged by old Polimard, who died the victim of an epizooty, which made havoc in his district. This, however, is not a reason for him to take the name of the D'Aranceys, and what is worse, their arms, which that vulgar and impudent little creature, forsooth, calls her arms, and which she displays, I believe, even on her scullery maids' kitchen aprons. This is certainly very nice for the escutcheon of the D'Aranceys, whose name unfortunately is extinct; without that, the Polimards, male and female, should be whipped and branded, as ought to have been done to old Polimard, the first of the name.

This time I did not have the courage to censure Pommerive; these people were, in fact, such low-bred parvenus, their effrontery was so plebeian, their back-stairs insolence so ridiculous, that I freely and willingly relinquished them to his tender mercies. "But what has made you so indignant with your excellent friends, M. de Pommerive?"

"Everything; because everything is first-class, and that their presence spoils all. Surrounded by this household of common folks, it seemed to me all the time that I was being entertained by the steward and housekeeper

of some absent lord, who were having fine sport in the absence of their master. But that is not all. Would you believe it? This Polimard-d'Arancey gets a fancy to set up a hunting retinue, and he has dared, actually dared, to engage as his first huntsman the famous La Brisée, who had just left the kennels of his Highness the Duke of Bourbon. Of course you will understand that I made La Brisée feel so ashamed at being chief huntsman to a M. Polimard, that I made him desert, giving him, however, a recommendation to the Marquis D. H——, where, at least, he will have an honourable position and be appreciated."

"I see, M. de Pommerive, that you are not much changed; you are as ever the most amiable of men."

"But you, — what are you doing? Still a statesman? A diplomat? Ah, by the bye, talking of diplomats, do you still go to that idiot of a Russian prince, that bad substitute for Potier and Brunet? I never set my foot now inside his door, or rather inside his wife's door, for happily for us he has taken himself away."

"And for what reason is the Princesse de Fersen deprived of the honour of seeing you, M. de Pommerive?"

"Why? Because I generally do like every one else; and, excepting diplomats and a few strangers, nobody in society sets a foot inside the princess's door."

"And why is this?" I inquired, almost mechanically, of M. de Pommerive.

"Forsooth! It is no secret, everybody knows it. The beautiful Muscovite is just simply a spy in high life."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE LAST EVENING.

One more effort, and this cruel task will be at an end.

In vain I call upon my memory; I cannot remember what I said to Pommerive, and believe I made no reply.

I only remember that I felt neither indignant nor angry, as I would have been had this man uttered a calumny or an insult; on the contrary, I was utterly overwhelmed in the presence of this terrible accusation! It suddenly illumined the past with a sinister light, it abruptly aroused those implacable suspicions, of which I at once felt the sharp sting.

My grief was such that my brain was frenzied.

Mechanically I returned home, finding my way by instinct.

By degrees, I regained the thread of my ideas.

I had already suffered so much from similar causes that I endeavoured to struggle with all my might against this new suspicion.

I hoped to sift truth from falsehood, by submitting the past to the horrible interpretation given to Madame de Fersen's life.

Armed with this infamous accusation, cold and calm, like a man about to stake his life and honour on a chance, I set myself to this work of hateful analysis.

This time, also, I cleared my thoughts, by writing them down, and I find these notes. They contrast

cruelly with the preceding radiant pages, with those days of sunlight written formerly at the Grove.

PARIS, 13th December, 18—.

Let us examine the facts.

Madame de Fersen is accused of being a spy.

What credit does her conduct give to these infamous suspicions?

I meet Catherine at Khios. After several days of intercourse, I attempt a declaration, which she severely repulses; then I surround her with the most respectful attentions, I give her counsels the most delicate and disinterested. If I do not utter the word love, everything in my tender and eager attentions reveals this sentiment.

She remains cold, and offers me her friendship.

I again meet Catherine in Paris. In spite of my blind submission to Irene's painful whims, in spite of the numberless proofs of the deepest and most noble passion, one day, without cause, without hesitation, under the most frivolous pretext, Catherine cruelly breaks with me.

Later, it is true, she tells me that jealousy alone was responsible for her conduct.

She said that; but I remember the harshness of her accent, her steely glance, which struck me to the heart.

She was doubtless feigning; she can, therefore, dissimulate; she is false. I did not believe it.

The mysterious affection of which Irene was the bond is now broken. Catherine loves me no more! She shows herself even ungrateful, as a friend. I see her no more.

In despair, I seek distraction in work. I accept a position of apparent importance with the minister; public opinion attributes to me an exaggerated share in state affairs. From this time, Madame de Fersen, until now so inflexible towards me, by degrees becomes less cold when she meets me in society; her looks, the tone

of her voice, do not harmonise with the conventional trifling of her conversation; and, at last, at a ball at the château, she comes resolutely towards me, with the view of renewing our interrupted relations. I meet coldly these advances, and the next morning she writes to me.

This she has confessed to me. This sudden change in her affections she attributes to her joy at my breaking with Madame de V—— and to the alarming condition in which her child had once more fallen.

I wish to believe her, for it would be odious to think that the abrupt change from disdain to tenderness should have been brought about by the hope of securing to herself a tool in the very heart of the French cabinet.

I leave for Havre. Irene is at death's door; her mother recalls me. I hasten, I save her.

During a whole month that I am by the child's bedside, does Catherine utter one word of gratitude, one word of tenderness?

No.

We go to the Grove; she shows the same calm, cold feeling towards me.

But one day an official publication announces that I am to be called to a high post, where state secrets culminate.

The evening of that very day, this woman, until then so austere, so reserved, so chaste, throws herself suddenly into my arms.

It is true, she says she was drawn by her grateful admiration for a sacrifice unknown to her until then.

If she is to be believed, what is her heart made of?

I have saved her child's life, and Catherine remains insensible.

I sustain a financial loss, and Catherine forgets all for my sake.

And yet I prefer to believe Catherine more sensitive to material sacrifices, and almost indifferent to the soul's devotion, than to believe she unblushingly gave

herself to the future confidant of the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Those four months passed at the Grove were radiant, oh, very radiant for me, whose happiness was pure, and not tinged with shame.

Only, at this moment, circumstances strike me which I had not previously observed.

At the Grove, Catherine plied me with questions as to my labours with M. de Sérigny; she interrogated me minutely as to the impressions or memories which I retained. When I confessed frankly their insignificance, and chose rather to speak of our love, she was annoyed and pouted, she reproached me with being either too discreet or too frivolous.

When I wished to abandon the ungrateful career which I had adopted in idleness, Catherine employed all the resources of her mind, all her influence, all her power over me to deter me from resigning my position.

It is true that these questions and this persuasion were alike used in the name of the profound interest which she felt for me.

I believe it, for it would be outrageous to suppose that her reluctance to see me abandon my career was prompted by her reluctance to forfeit the price of her long premeditated error.

Since her return to Paris, what has her life been? Did she sacrifice at my request her accustomed social relations? On the contrary, she increased them, and her drawing-room has become a centre of diplomatic intrigue.

Our long days of tender affection have given place to occupations which are not those of a woman dominated by love.

If I sadly reproach her for this unhappy change, her answer is that she must obey her husband's expressed wishes, — wishes that are all the more sacred to her since she has been guilty of so censurable an error.

I believe her in this case, without hesitation. I believe her very anxious to please the prince.

But I also have some rights.

I saved her child's life.

And what did she give me in return?

Herself, yes, she gave me herself.

This sacrifice of her honour, of her duties, has been either terrible and intoxicating, or it has only been an infamous, an odious calculation!

If this proof of love has been for her what it ever is for a virtuous, passionate woman, a most agonising sacrifice, why did she then refuse to abandon interests that were of the utmost insignificance in comparison with the irreparable fault she had committed?

Are these interests dearer to her than her love? Is her love only secondary to them?

It is, then, only a means, a pretext?

So be it; I have been the puppet of an intriguing woman, but she is very beautiful, and I am only half her dupe.

Such was the abominable theme I developed with the diabolical power of paradoxes.

I was so incensed that I firmly believed I had wrestled against these frightful suspicions; and I became convinced of these horrors with the same bitter satisfaction of the man who discovers the vile snare into which he has fallen.

As an executioner I struck pitilessly, as a victim I moaned bitterly.

The remembrance of Hélène, of Marguerite, of Falmouth, — nothing could bring me to my senses.

From the confirmation of so much infamy to the hate and scorn it inspired, there was but one step for my fierce monomania.

From this point of view, all that was noble and generous in my conduct seemed to me shamefully ridiculous.

I was oppressed by these reflections when this letter from Catherine was handed to me:

"A sad, unhappy petitioner asks you to be kind and indulgent towards her; she wants you to pardon all that she has suffered to-day; she hopes to be alone this evening, and will expect you. Come; she is, moreover, resolved that Europe shall no longer be your rival."

In my state of mind, this letter so tenderly imploring, this simple allusion to my reproaches, seemed to me so humbly offensive, so coldly insulting, that I was on the point of writing to Madame de Fersen that I would never again see her.

But I changed my mind.

I wrote to her that I would call on her that evening.

I waited for the hour with frightful anxiety.

I had laid my plan.

At ten o'clock I went to Madame de Fersen's, expecting to find her alone.

A thousand confused thoughts were rushing through my mind. Anger, hate, love, a remorseful anticipation of the wrong I was about to commit, a vague instinct of the injustice of my suspicions, all combined to put me in a feverish exasperated condition, the consequences of which I could not foresee.

Contrary to my expectations, Catherine had several persons with her.

This new proof of what I called her falsehood incensed me; for a moment I was on the point of turning back and abandoning my purpose, but an irresistible force drove me, and I entered.

The sight of people, and the control which I had always possessed over myself, at once changed my violent anger into a polished, cold, and biting irony.

This scene is still present to me. Catherine, seated near the fireplace, was chatting with a friend.

My first look was doubtless very terrible, for Madame de Fersen, bewildered, suddenly turned pale.

The conversation continued; I shared in it with the greatest calmness, even asserting my superiority, for I was gay, almost brilliant.

For those who were unacquainted with the circumstances, there was nothing extraordinary; it was a pleasant evening of friendly conversation, like a thousand other evenings; but between Catherine and me, a mute, mysterious, tragic scene was being enacted.

Our way of understanding each other by half words, of seeking and divining the value of an inflection of the voice, of a gesture, or a smile, enabled me now to make Catherine undergo the reaction of my odious thoughts.

At my entrance, Catherine was amazed.

She endeavoured, however, to recover herself, and, to show me that she had received people against her will, she graciously thanked M. de —— for having forced an entrance to acquaint her with the result of the vote which had been taken at a very late hour. "Without that," continued Catherine, "I would have been deprived of the pleasure of seeing several of my friends, who took advantage of the breach you made to invade my solitude."

An imploring glance at me accompanied these words.

While continuing my conversation with M. de ——, my neighbour, I replied by so scornful a smile that Catherine all but betrayed herself.

What shall I say? All these attempts which she indirectly made to calm me, or to grasp at the cause of so deep a resentment, were thus cruelly repulsed.

She knew too well the various expressions of my countenance, her heart was too much in unison with mine, she was of too sensitive a nature, not to divine that it was not a question of a lover's quarrel, but that a great danger menaced her love.

She had a presentiment of this danger; in despair

she sought its cause, and was obliged to smile, and to follow an indifferent conversation.

This torture lasted one hour.

By degrees, her strength and self-control abandoned her; two or three times her absent-mindedness had been noticed; and, at last, there was such a change in her features that M. de —— inquired if she were not well.

This question confused her; she answered she was well, and rang the bell for tea.

It was eleven o'clock.

She took advantage of the momentary disturbance caused by the preparations for tea to come near me, saying:

"Will you come and see a picture which is offered me for sale? It is there in the small parlour."

"I am not much of a connoisseur," I replied, "but if I cannot venture on advising you, madame, I promise to give you truthfully my impressions."

I followed her into the next room.

At the risk of being seen, she took my hand, and in a voice almost extinct she said: "Arthur, have pity on me! What I am suffering is beyond my strength, beyond my courage!"

At this moment, M. de —— also entered the parlour to see the picture.

Madame de Fersen had so completely lost her head, that I had abruptly to withdraw my hand from hers.

I believe M. de —— noticed the movement, for he appeared confused.

"This picture is very good," I said to Catherine, "the expression is charming. Art has never more closely approached to nature."

Madame de Fersen was so weak that she leaned upon an easy chair.

M. de —— admired the picture complacently. The servant announced to the princess that tea was ready.

We returned to the drawing-room. Catherine could scarcely stand.

According to her custom, she stood near the table pouring out the tea; she offered me a cup, and was gazing at me almost wildly, when the cracking of a whip and the jingling of bells were heard in the courtyard.

Struck by a terrible presentiment, Catherine allowed the cup to slip from her fingers just as I was about to take hold of it, and cried, in a strangled voice: "What is that?"

"A thousand pardons for my awkwardness, madame, and for the noise those wretches are making. As I take my departure to-night, I have taken the liberty to order my travelling carriage to come for me here, not wishing to lose one moment of the precious time I might enjoy your society."

Catherine could not resist this last shock; she forgot herself completely, and, in a smothered voice, resting her trembling hands upon my arm, she cried: "It is impossible, you are not leaving, you shall not leave! I will not allow you to leave!"

At the movement of general consternation, at the confused, embarrassed expression of the spectators of this scene, I could see that Madame de Fersen's reputation, hitherto unassailed, was now for ever lost.

I remained inflexible.

Gently disengaging my arm from her hands, I said:

"I feel so happy and proud, madame, at the regret my departure seems to give you, that I would already be thinking of my return, were it not unfortunately impossible to predict it." Then in saluting her I added: "Here, madame, are the particulars you asked of me."

And I handed her a duplicate of the commentary I had written on her love.

Catherine no longer heard me; she had fallen prostrated into an armchair, mechanically holding in her hands the notes I had left her.

I took my departure.

The next evening I was here, — at Serval.

Three months ago I heard that Irene was dead, — dead, doubtless, of grief at seeing me no more.

Madame de Fersen has returned to Russia with her husband.

To put the crowning stroke to my remorse and despair, I also learned that the Prince de Fersen had been on the point of obtaining the post of Russian ambassador to France, but that suddenly he had withdrawn.

This explained Catherine's persistence in her diplomatic relations.

She wanted to assist her husband in obtaining an important post, in order that they might remain in France, and be with me.

Since the day following that terrible evening I reside at Serval, this old and gloomy ancestral château.

When I heard of Irene's death, I became almost insane.

I loathe myself as her murderer.

My life here is isolated and desolate.

For the last six months I have seen no one, not a soul.

Each day I meditate for hours before my father's portrait.

I had charged myself with the task of writing this journal.

My task is now accomplished.

I have been the cause of suffering to some innocent creatures, but I, also, have suffered much. Ah, *mon Dieu!* am I not still suffering?

What is my future?

Before me life is dark and gloomy; I am pursued by remorse for the past.

THE LAST EVENING.

What is my fate?

Am I to perish by suicide? Am I to die the violent death Irene predicted for me?

What thoughts!

And this very day I am twenty-eight.

MARIE BELMONT

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MARIE BELMONT.

SERVAL, January 20, 18—.

WHO would have said six months ago that I would ever take up this journal again, or, rather, that I would ever recover from the apathy of heart and mind into which I had been thrown by my rupture with Madame de Fersen, by the death of Irene?

Such, though, is the case.

And yet my despair was frightful!

To-day, though the remembrance of that time gives me sore pain, a distant hope, new sensations mitigate that soreness.

I smile sadly when I read in my journal, which I have just been looking over, these words repeated so often:

"Never was there greater sorrow —"

"Never was there more happiness —"

"Never can I forget —"

And now new joys have obliterated those sorrows; new troubles have faded those joys. Thus day after day, forgetfulness, that dark, cold tide, creeps up higher, higher, and swallows up in the black abyss of the past the souvenirs that time has discoloured.

My mother! my father! Hélène! Marguerite! Catherine! you to whom I owe so much sorrow and so much felicity! Space or the tomb now separates you all from me; and I scarcely think of you at all!

Perhaps, alas! it will be even so with the feelings and impressions that fill my mind at the present time.

In spite of which I cannot help believing that they will last for ever.

Ah, my father! my father! you told me a very dreadful, a very dangerous truth, when you affirmed that forgetfulness was the only reality of our lives.

Thus, then, will I open this journal that I believed was closed for ever.

I believed, too, that my heart was closed to all tender and happy impressions.

But since I can still suffer, I will continue to write:

Three months ago on a cloudy autumn morning I went out early. A cold, thick fog was falling. I followed the edge of the forest, and was walking dreamily along, while behind me came an old black pony, the venerable Black that my cousin Hélène used to ride so often in the old days.

As I went along thus, with my head bowed towards the ground, I saw the newly made tracks of a great wild boar.

Having lately been seeking to divert myself by violent exercise, I had brought thirty fox-hounds over from London, and begun to hunt in fairly good style, to the great delight of old Lefort, one of my father's "whippers-in," whom I had retained as head keeper.

In following, out of curiosity, the trace of the boar, whose presence in the forest had been unknown up to this time, I left the edge of the woods and plunged deep into the undergrowth. After walking about three leagues I arrived at a little farm, called the *ferme des Prés*, which was situated on the confines of immense fields. Here I lost trace of the wild boar.

This farm had recently been leased to a widow, named Madame Kerouët. My superintendent had spoken to

me of the great activity of this woman, who came from the neighbourhood of Nantes, the death of her husband having caused her to quit the place that she helped him to farm in Brittany. I thought I would profit by the chance that had led me to the farm to make the acquaintance of my new tenant.

La ferme des Prés was in a very picturesque situation. Its principal building, surrounded by a vast courtyard, backed up on the edge of the forest. This habitation, which had formerly been a hunting lodge, was built in the form of a little castle, flanked by two towers. An arched doorway, surmounted by a coat-of-arms, led in to the ground floor. Time had given a gray colouring to these old walls, which were built with antique solidity. The tiles of the roof were all covered with moss, and clouds of pigeons swarmed around the pointed cone of one of the towers which had been changed into a pigeon-house.

Contrary to the custom of most of our farmers, the courtyard of the farm, instead of being littered with rubbish, was extremely clean and well kept. The ploughs, the harrows, the drills, were all newly painted of a fine olive-green colour, and were symmetrically arranged under a vast shed, along with the harness of the work-horses and yokes of the oxen.

A thick trellis divided the courtyard in its entire length, and separated it into two parts, one of which was given up to fowls of every kind, while the other was well sprinkled sand the colour of yellow ochre, and led up to the arched door of the little manor-house, on each side of which were great clumps of hollyhocks and sun-flowers.

I was examining with satisfaction the exterior of the farmhouse, when I heard with the greatest surprise the harmonious warbling of a sweet, clear voice.

These sounds seemed to come from a little window. It was high and narrow, and was placed near the

middle of one of the towers, where it was curtained by the thick vines of the morning-glory and nasturtiums.

After preluding thus, the voice was silent for awhile, but soon broke out again, singing the romance of the willow from Rossini's "Othello."

The voice was of remarkable quality, and showed high cultivation. It was very expressive, and full of sweetness and sadness.

I was greatly astonished. The song had ceased and I was still listening, when I saw a woman of fifty or thereabouts appear on the sill of the little arched doorway. She wore a black dress and a cap which was as white as the snow.

When she noticed me, she gave me a look of uneasy interrogation.

She was of medium height, sturdy, brown-eyed, and sunburnt. Her face had a remarkable expression of frankness and good temper.

"What can I do to serve you, monsieur?" she asked, with a half courtesy, which was no doubt due to my poor old pony, and my costume of gentleman-farmer, as the English say.

"It is beginning to rain, madame. Will you permit me to wait here awhile under shelter, and tell me if I am very far from the village of Blémur?"

This question was nothing but a pretext to gain time, and try to discover the Desdemona.

"The village of Blémur, blessed Virgin! but you will never get there before the black night, monsieur, though you have got a famous little horse there," said the *fermière*, as she examined Black with the eye of a connoisseur.

"Must I follow the highroad of the forest to go to Blémur?"

"Straight ahead, monsieur; one way you go to Blémur, and the other way to the Château de Serval, and it is

three good leagues, they say so at least, for I haven't been very long in this part of the country."

"Then you will allow me, madame, to wait here under the shed until the shower is over?"

"I can do better than that, monsieur; you will be much better off here in the house, come in if you please."

"I will be very glad to accept your offer, madame, though seeing such a beautifully kept shed, I could easily fancy myself in a salon."

This compliment pleased Madame Kerouët immensely, for she said, in an important way:

"Ah, *dame!* that is the way we always keep our farms in our Brittany."

All the while I was talking with the *fermi`rè* I had not taken my eyes off the little window in the tower; several times I fancied I saw a white hand cautiously push aside some branches of the verdure which covered the window.

Madame Kerouët preceded me into the farmhouse. I tied up Black, and followed the good woman into her home.

To the left of the entrance door was a kitchen ornamented with all its accessories of copper and tin, which two strong peasant girls were busily scouring and which shone like gold and silver.

On the right we entered a great chamber, where there were two beds with twisted columns hung with curtains of green serge which were embroidered in red. These two beds were separated by a high chimneypiece where a good fire of pine cones was flaming. On the mantelpiece the only ornaments were an old looking-glass with its frame of red lacquer, and two wax statuettes under glass shades, — a St. John with his lamb, and a St. Genevieve with her fawn.

Between the two windows with their little diamond panes there hung on the wall an antique clock called a cuckoo; it was of gray wood painted with pink and

blue flowers, and its two weights hung down on two cords of unequal length.

There was a spinning-wheel, a great armchair covered with tapestry, which was sacred to the mistress, a chair for Desdemona, two stools for the servant-maids, and a dresser loaded with faience. These articles, with a round, well-waxed walnut table, completed the furniture of the room, which served as a parlour, dining-room, and bedroom.

From the diamond window-panes to the floor everything shone with cleanliness. From the brown beams which crossed the ceiling were hanging long garlands of grapes dried for use in winter, and the whitewashed walls were ornamented with a set of coloured engravings framed in black wood, which illustrated the story of the Prodigal Son.

The mistress received my compliments on the neatness of her house with evident pride. While I was speaking the door opened, and the young woman who sang so well came in. When she saw me, she blushed, and started out again.

"Stay with us, Marie," Madame Kerouët said to her, affectionately.

I could not look on the enchanting beauty of that face without thinking of the Holy Virgins of Raphael.

My admiration was so marked, my astonishment so great, on finding such beauty hidden in a farmhouse, — and I took no pains to conceal my feelings, — that Marie was quite taken back.

"This is my niece, monsieur," said the *fermière*, who neither noticed my surprise nor Desdemona's trouble. "She is the daughter of my poor brother, lieutenant in the Old Guard, who was killed at Waterloo. Thanks to the protection of Monseigneur the Bishop of Nantes, we were permitted to send Marie to St. Denis, where she was educated like a demoiselle. She remained there until her marriage, which took place at Nantes about

a year ago." Madame Kerouët said this with a sigh. Then she continued: "But sit down, monsieur; and thou, Marie, go get a bottle of wine and a bit of warm *galette*."

"A thousand thanks, madame," said I, "I would rather not take anything. As soon as the rain is over I will continue on my journey."

To keep herself in countenance, Marie sat down to her aunt's spinning-wheel.

"Perhaps you are on your way to the Château de Serval?"

"*Non*, madame; I told you I was going to Blémur."

"Ah, yes, to be sure, to Blémur; pardon, monsieur, — so much the better for you."

"How is that, madame? Is the master of Serval inhospitable?"

"I don't know anything about that, monsieur; but they do say that he has no more wish to see human faces than human faces have to see him," replied Madame Kerouët.

"And why is that? Does he wish to live alone?"

"Hum, hum!" said the *fermière*, shaking her head, "I have only just come to these parts, and don't know the truth of the ugly stories they tell about him; besides, monsieur, the count is our master, and a very good master, they say; so I won't speak of what is none of my business. But, Marie, you are tangling all my flax again," she called out to the young woman. "Never wilt thou know how to use a distaff; hand it to me."

"And you, madame," I said to Marie, "have you any more certain information than madame your aunt as to the redoubtable inhabitant of Serval?"

"No, monsieur, I have only heard them say that M. the count lived a very retired life; and as I love solitude myself, I can understand that others care for it as well."

"You have so many means of charming your retreat,

madame, that I can readily believe it must be attractive; in the first place, you are an excellent musician. I can say so, because I have just been fortunate enough to hear you sing."

"And she can draw and paint, too," added Madame Kerouët, admiringly.

"Then, madame," said I to Marie, "I must beg you, in the name of the cherished occupation which we share in common, to ask your aunt to grant me the permission of making some sketches of this farm whose situation I find so charming."

"You have no need of asking Marie's aid for that," said Madame Kerouët; "you can make as many sketches as you wish, it can do nobody any harm." I thanked the *fermière;* and, not wishing to make too long a first visit, I mounted my pony and started off.

Through caprice, I desired to keep up my *incognito*, which would be easy enough for awhile at least, for the Field Farm was quite a distance from Serval, and the tenants and farm hands from the one place hardly ever came over to the other.

The day after my first interview with Marie I furnished myself with the complete outfit of an artist; for since my return to Serval, I, too, had sought distraction in painting, and, mounted on good old Black, I started for the Field Farm.

Thanks to my frequent visits, a certain amount of friendliness was established between Marie, her aunt, and myself.

As I never saw any M. Belmont, I supposed him to be on a journey, and asked no questions about him. I drew the farm from every point of view, and I gave two or three of the sketches to Madame Kerouët, who was enchanted with them. Very often Marie came out and sketched with me. She had a great deal of talent.

Contrary to the habit of most young girls, Marie had profited by the excellent education that is afforded in

such establishments as St. Denis. Fond of learning, she had neglected none of her studies, none of the useful or agreeable arts that were taught in that institution; so that, being naturally gifted, she had cultivated her talents to the utmost. To a solid, extended, and varied instruction, she added a real vocation for art. But Marie was quite unconscious of the rarity of such an assemblage of delightful talents. She never showed the least vanity in her superiority, but would often, with a schoolgirl's satisfaction, tell me of her former successes in history, painting, or music, as I had heard other women tell of their triumphs in coquetry.

Marie was only eighteen, and had the happy and fanciful imagination of a child. When she was in a confidential mood, I found her to be simple, sweet-tempered, and gay. She possessed that innocent gaiety which is the outcome of a serene soul and a life of intelligent and noble occupation. The more I studied her guileless nature, the more attached to her I became.

I did not feel for Marie a violent and wild passion, but when she was near me I was so perfectly and entirely happy that I had no desire for anything further, nor any regret for the turmoil of a passionate love. Strangely, though Marie was so angelically beautiful, though her form was charming, I was more interested in her wit, her candour, and the thousand aspirations of her young soul, than in her physical perfections. I had never made her the least compliment on her beauty, but I had never made any secret of the interest I felt in her talents and her exquisite natural gifts.

Although she was a married woman, she possessed such a mysterious and virginal charm that my behaviour towards her was respectful and even singularly timid.

Madame Kerouët, Marie's aunt, was a woman of rare good sense. She was high-minded and kind-hearted. Her piety, which was sweet and fervent, inspired her to

do the most charitable actions. No poor person ever left the farm without having received, besides a trifling sum of money, some of those words of encouragement more precious than alms.

Little by little I discovered in this good woman a very treasure-house of kindness and practical virtue. Her conversations were always interesting to me, for she could tell me many curious facts concerning agriculture. Sometimes her perfect faith gave an elevation to her thoughts that surprised me, and I would say to myself, "What is the secret of a religion that can so illuminate a simple mind?"

I had been visiting the farm assiduously for two months when one day Madame Kerouët said to me:

"It must astonish you to see Marie thus living the life of a widow. As you are our friend I am going to tell you the whole sad story. Figure to yourself, monsieur, that my husband and I had the lease of a farm at Thouars near Nantes. The farm belonged to M. Duvallon, a rich ship-owner of the town, who owed the beginning of his fortune to having sailed as a pirate during the war with England.

"Though he was surly, M. Duvallon was kind; he was very fond of my husband. One day Kerouët told him about our niece, who was soon to come home from St. Denis. With her fine education, that dear child could not marry a peasant, and we were not rich enough to marry her to a monsieur. Seeing our state of embarrassment, M. Duvallon said to Kerouët: 'If your niece is reasonable I will take it upon myself to settle her in life.'

"'With whom?' asked my husband.

"'With one of my old comrades, a sea captain who wishes to give up the sea and live as a good bourgeois. He has just come here. He is rich. He is not a dandy, but he is as good as gold and as true as steel, and I am sure he will make your niece perfectly happy.'

"Kerouët came home and told me all this. It was a

rare piece of good luck for us and, above all, for Marie, the poor orphan.

"This was in the month of October last year. Marie being now eighteen years old could no longer remain at St. Denis. So we sent for her to come to the farm, and arranged for a day on which M. Duvallon should bring his friend, M. Belmont, to see our niece before coming to any conclusion, you understand.

"That day, it was a Sunday, our farm was as clean as a pin. Kerouët, Marie, and I were all decked out in our best, when M. Duvallon arrives in a cabriolet with his friend. What could we do, monsieur? Without doubt his friend was not what you call a *joli garçon*, but he had the cross of honour, the look of a brave man, and he seemed very well preserved for his age, which might be from forty-five to fifty.

"This monsieur was very amiable to us. From time to time I would look at Marie; she did not seem to be particularly taken with M. Belmont, but I knew she was reasonable, and then, monsieur, with her education I felt that what she needed above all things was a certain amount of means, and that we ought to sacrifice a great many things to that end. It was a misfortune, no doubt, but we were not in a position to choose. When those messieurs were gone, we told Marie frankly what it was all about.

"*Dame!* monsieur, we all shed a lot of tears, she and I and my poor Kerouët, for our poor dear child was very young, and M. Belmont was very old for her, but at least Marie would be provided for in the future and we could die in peace and tranquillity.

"She understood all that and was resigned, so the next day when M. Duvallon came back we gave him our word.

"For a fortnight M. Belmont came to see us every day. Folks say that sailors are rough and surly. He was very polite, very kind, very complaisant to Marie, so she

ended by seeing him without dislike and was touched by the proofs of affection that he showed her.

"Then what was more pleasing to us was that Marie was not to be separated from us, for he meant to buy a little country-place near Thouars, and so we should be able to see each other every day.

"Well, at last she got so used to seeing M. Belmont that she consented to paint his portrait. She keeps it up there in her study in the tower, where she doesn't permit any one to enter. It is as like as like can be.

"About the last of December, M. Belmont told us that he was going to Paris to buy the wedding presents, the marriage was to take place at Nantes during the month of January.

"At the end of a fortnight, M. Belmont came back with splendid things for Marie.

"Since the sad event which has separated us, I have remembered that after his return from Paris M. Belmont often seemed to be very much depressed; but he was always good and kind to us; only he insisted that instead of waiting until the first of February, the date fixed for the marriage, the wedding should take place sooner.

"We consented to this, and they were married on the seventeenth of January; it was a Friday. In the morning we signed the contract. M. Belmont settled on Marie six thousand francs a year. For folks like us it was very fine, was it not, monsieur?

"After signing the contract we went to the *mairie*, and then to the church, and we all came back to dinner to the country-house of M. Duvallon, who was M. Belmont's best man.

"We were all seated at the table and had got as far as dessert. M. Belmont had just begun to sing some verses he had composed on his marriage, the poor dear man, when all of a sudden there arrived from Nantes one of M. Duvallon's servants. He hands a letter to his

master. M. Duvallon turns pale, gets up from the table and cries out, 'Belmont! listen!' I remember that poor Belmont was singing at that moment a verse that began like this: 'Hymen waves his torch.'

"M. Belmont gets up, but he has hardly read the letter which Duvallon shows him when he makes a face, — ah, monsieur, such a terrible face, that I have yet to understand how a man who had ordinarily such a kind look could ever take on such an expression of ferocity.

"Then, controlling himself, he goes up to Marie, kisses her, and says: 'Don't worry about me, my *petite femme*, thou shalt have news of me very soon;' then he disappeared with Duvallon, who said to us, as he went out: 'Belmont is compromised in a political affair like — *carbonaro*.' Yes, that is the word, *carbonaro*," added Madame Kerouët, in recalling her souvenirs. "'He must escape, his life depends on it. If they come here to arrest him, try and keep the *commissaire* here as long as possible.'

"They had hardly been gone a quarter of an hour when an officer of the gendarmerie arrives in a carriage with a *commissaire* of police, as they had foreseen. They ask for M. Belmont, sea captain.

"You know very well that we said never a word. They seek everywhere, but find no one, and they keep that up for at least two hours.

"The *commissaire* was about to give it up when some one of the company, having by accident spoken of the three-master *La Belle Alexandrine*, which was to sail that day from Nantes, the brigadier of gendarmerie cried out: 'And the tide is high at three o'clock! And now it is five! Before we can get back to Nantes it will be seven o'clock. If our man means to get away on that ship, he will be out of the mouth of the river by seven o'clock this evening, and beyond our reach.'

"Thereupon they all get into the carriage with the *commissaire*, and start back for Nantes at a gallop; but they got there too late. That poor dear Belmont had

been lucky enough to embark on *La Belle Alexandrine*, and was off to Havana. M. Duvallon came the next day to tell us all about it.

"Alas! monsieur, misfortunes never come alone. Two months after all these events, my poor Kerouët died of lung fever.

"M. Duvallon sold the farm he owned at Thouars, and I should have been without resources if the superintendent of the Château of Serval, who was acquainted with Kerouët, and knew that I was capable of managing a farm, had not proposed that I should rent this one, where I am very contented, but alas, I regret every day my poor Kerouët, and am still very uneasy as to the fate of M. Belmont, who has only written to us once by a vessel from Nantes which *La Belle Alexandrine* met at sea.

"In his letter, Belmont told us not to worry, and that one of these days he would return and surprise us. As for Marie, I cannot say that she grieves very much for M. Belmont, the poor dear child, she knew him too little for that; but, monsieur, I am sorry for all this on her account, for should I die to-morrow what would become of her?

"To complete all, she is so scrupulous that it is impossible to get her to decide to touch a cent of the six thousand francs which M. Belmont settled on her, and which M. Duvallon sends her every three months. We take the money to a notary at Nantes, and there it will stay until Belmont comes back again, and that will be the Lord knows when."

Such was the recital of Madame Kerouët.

In fact, about the time of M. Belmont's departure, the police had discovered several Liberal plots. It was a time when secret societies were organising on a formidable scale; therefore, it was quite possible that he had been seriously mixed up in a conspiracy against the government.

Since having this confidential conversation with her aunt, Marie appeared lovelier than ever to me, and more charming.

So I continued my daily visits to the farm; sometimes even, when it was snowing or excessively cold, good Madame Kerouët invited me to stay there all night, and became quite provoked when I proposed starting off in the dark to go through the forest by the ill-kept road which led to Blémur, where I was supposed to live.

If I decided to remain, Marie would innocently show how pleased she was; there would be almost a little fête at the farm. Madame Kerouët busied herself about the details of the dinner, and Marie, who slept in her aunt's room, with attentive and gracious hospitality saw that nothing was wanting in the little room destined for me, which was up in one of the towers.

That hospitality so kindly and thoughtful touched me deeply; but what proved to me the purity of sentiment of these two women, and their generous confidence in me, was the fact, that they never thought for a moment that the frequency of my visits might compromise them. My arrival always pleased them; I enlivened and brightened their solitude; and if I thanked them with effusion for all their kindness to me, Madame Kerouët would say, naïvely: "Should not we poor country women rather be grateful that you, monsieur, an artist (they supposed I was a painter), should help us to pass our long winter evenings so pleasantly, coming almost every day, three leagues to come and three leagues to go back again, — such horrid weather, too! *Tenez*, M. Arthur," said the good-hearted woman. "I don't know how it has come about, but now you are like one of our own family, and if you had to give up your visits we would be quite miserable and sad, is not that so, Marie?"

"Oh, certainly we would, my aunt," said Marie, with adorable candour.

I knew that Marie had very few books. She spoke

perfectly well both English and Italian. I therefore sent to Paris for a set of books, and ordered them to be sent by way of Nantes, and from Nantes to be forwarded to the farm.

Just as I had hoped, the present of the books was attributed to M. Belmont, or to his friend, M. Duvallon.

By such means, I succeeded in surrounding Marie and her aunt with a certain degree of comfort which was until then wanting. Little at a time furniture and carpets arrived at the farm, and were received joyfully as an attention from the exile or his friend.

Filled with gratitude, Marie wrote a charming letter of thanks to M. Duvallon, who answered her saying that he did not understand a word of Madame Belmont's gratitude.

Fearing discovery, I begged Madame Kerouët not to speak any more of these presents, making her believe that M. Belmont had good reasons for wishing for secrecy.

Marie's birthday was soon to be celebrated. On that anniversary she was to permit me to enter the mysterious little room she called her study, and which I had not been allowed to see before.

Knowing that the room was exactly like the one I inhabited in the opposite tower, such times as I slept all night at the farm, I had sent from Paris, still by the way of Nantes, all that was needed to furnish it with elegance. One of Marie's greatest regrets was that she had neither piano nor harp. I sent then for these two instruments, which were to arrive at the farm in time for Marie's birthday. All these details gave me infinite satisfaction.

Every day, well wrapped up, I started from Serval on my pony, braving the rain and the snow. I arrived at the farm, where I found a bright fire crackling in my room. I dressed myself with some care in spite of the everlasting teasing of the worthy *fermière*, who reproached me

for being too *coquet*, then I went down into the *grande chambre.*

If the weather was not too bad, Marie took my arm and we sallied forth to affront the wind and cold, climb the mountainsides, where we gathered plants for Marie's herbarium, or tramp through the forest, where we would amuse ourselves by startling the doe with her faun, from her hiding-place in these solitary glades.

During these long walks, Marie, who was always lively, laughed and joked like a schoolgirl, and treated me like a brother. In her chaste innocence she often made me undergo severe trials. Sometimes it was her fur collar to fasten, sometimes to push up her long hair under her hat, or to fasten the lace of her shoe, which had become undone.

So, in those long tramps, as I would gaze on the lovely face of Marie, which under its curls, all powdered with sleet, looked like a rose covered with snow, — how many times an avowal came to my lips! How often was I on the point of declaring my love! But Marie, crossing both of her arms on mine, would lean on me with such confidence, would look at me with such candour and security, that each day I was fain to put off this declaration until the next.

I was fearful that, if I risked a premature word, I might destroy all this tranquil happiness.

I waited then patiently. I was not deceived as to the sentiments I had inspired in Marie's breast; without being foolishly conceited or ridiculously vain, I could not withstand the evidence of my own eyes. For the last two months and more I had seen her almost every day. My attentions to her, to one so young, so unsophisticated, so little accustomed to the ways of the world, had made a deep impression on her; but I had recognised in her such high principles, such decided religious sentiment, and such a deep sense of duty, that I felt I would have to undergo a long struggle, perhaps

a painful one, although a thousand trifles showed me that Marie cared for me with a measure of affection of which she herself was most likely ignorant.

In the evening, after one of my dinners at the farm, Madame Kerouët, seated in her great armchair at the chimney-corner, would spin off a distaff of flax, while Marie and I, seated at the same table, arranged the plants we had collected for our herbariums in the course of our winter walks.

When fixing the slight stalks on paper, our hands would often touch. Often when we were both leaning over the table my hair would be pressed against Marie's forehead, or I would feel her warm breath caressing my cheek.

At such times she would blush, her breast would heave rapidly, and sometimes her hand would tremble on the paper.

Then, as if awakening from a dream, she would say to me, pretending to be reproachful: "See, now, how badly you have placed that plant."

"It is your fault," I would answer, laughing. "You neither help me, nor hold the paper."

"Not at all. It is you who have not the least patience, you are always afraid of getting gum on your fingers when you are pasting the little bands."

"Ah, what terrible wranglers!" said Madame Kerouët, "one of you is no better than the other!"

At other times, we took turns at reading aloud some of the works of Walter Scott, in which Madame Kerouët took great interest. Marie had a clear, sweet voice, and one of my greatest pleasures was to listen to her as she read.

But it was a greater pleasure still to watch her. So, when the time came for me to read, if I found any allusion to my love, I would first read the phrases with my eyes, and then repeat them aloud from memory, fixing on Marie a passionate look. Sometimes Marie

would lower her eyes, and put on a severe expression, but then, at others, she would blush, and with the end of her pretty forefinger make me an imperious sign to keep my eyes on my book.

Another trick that I invented was this: I would improvise whole passages, and introduce them into the book I was reading, so that when the situation permitted me I could give Marie a more distinct insight as to my love for her.

Thus, one evening, in that chaste and passionate scene where Ivanhoe declares his love for the beautiful Saxon, I substituted for the speech of the Crusader a long monologue, in which I made the most direct allusions to Marie and myself, by recalling a thousand souvenirs of our walks and talks.

Marie seemed quite overcome, — troubled. She looked at me reprovingly.

I stopped reading.

"I don't wish to interrupt you, M. Arthur," said Madame Kerouët, "for I don't think I ever heard you read so well as you have to-day."

Then putting down her distaff, she said, naïvely: "Ah, a woman would surely have a heart of stone not to have pity on a lover who talked like that. I know very little about it, but it seems to me that one could say no more than what Ivanhoe says, — it is all so true and natural."

"Oh, it is really all very beautiful," said Marie, "but M. Arthur must be tired. I will read now in my turn.'

As she took, in spite of my resistance, the book from my hand, she looked for the improvised passage, and not finding it said, saucily:

"The pages that you have just been reading are so beautiful that I want to read them over again."

"Thou art right, Marie," said her aunt; "I, too, would like to hear them once more."

"Ah, *mon Dieu*, ten o'clock, already!" said I, to change the subject. "I must be going."

"So it is, already!" said Madame Kerouët, as she looked at the clock.

Usually, when I started to go, Marie would go to the window to see what sort of weather it was. This evening she remained motionless.

Her aunt said to her: "Why don't you look to see if it is snowing, my child?"

Marie rose up and came back, saying, "It is snowing hard."

"It snows hard. What a heartless way you say that! You don't seem to remember that M. Arthur has three leagues to ride in the pitch-dark, and right through the forest."

I tried to meet Marie's eyes. She turned away her head; so I said to her, sadly, "*Bon soir*, madame."

"*Bon soir*, M. Arthur," she replied, without looking at me.

I heard the impatient whinnying of Black; the farm boy was bringing him from the stable. I was just leaving the room, when Marie, seizing an opportunity when her aunt was not looking, came close to me, and, taking my hand, said, with deep emotion:

"I am very angry with you. You do not know how much you have distressed me!"

The words were not precisely an avowal; and yet, in spite of the dark, in spite of the storm, I rode back to Serval with a joyful heart.

From that evening I began to take hope.

That was a week ago.

To-morrow is Marie's birthday, a solemn festival, when we are going to inaugurate the mysterious room in the tower.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE PORTRAIT.

SERVAL, 10th December, 18—.

I CAN scarcely believe what I have seen to-day.

What a strange fate is mine!

This morning, as we had agreed, I went to the farm.

It was the anniversary of Marie's birth; she had promised to allow me to enter the mysterious chamber that she occupies in one of the towers. It is there that she has had placed the harp and piano which recently arrived from Nantes.

"Come and see my retreat," said Marie to me, after breakfast.

We went up into the tower with Madame Kerouët.

We enter the room; what do I behold?

Facing me, in a large gold frame, there stands the portrait of the pirate of Porquerolles! the pilot of Malta!

"How did you come by that picture? Do you know who that man is?" I cried out, addressing the two women, who were staring at me in the greatest astonishment.

"Why, I painted that portrait myself, and that is M. Belmont," said Marie, with surprise.

"That is M. Belmont?"

"Certainly; that is my husband. But what is the matter with you, M. Arthur? Why are you so astonished, so overcome?"

"Have you ever seen M. Belmont anywhere?" asked Madame Kerouët.

I thought I was dreaming, or the victim of some extraordinary resemblance.

"The fact is," said I to Madame Kerouët, "I have met M. Belmont somewhere in my travels, or it might have been some one who is remarkably like him; for, on account of the circumstances under which we met, I cannot believe that the person I speak of can be the M. Belmont of this portrait."

"There is a very easy way of finding out if your M. Belmont is ours. What are your M. Belmont's teeth like?" said Marie's aunt.

"There is no longer the slightest doubt. It is he!" thought I.

"His teeth are like no one else's," I said, "they are sharp, and very wide apart."

That is just how they are," said Madame Kerouët, laughing, "and so for fun we call him the ogre."

Then it was he!

Everything was explained now.

In the ballroom at the château, the English ambassador had told me that they were on the track of the pirate, and hoped to capture him. The ball had taken place about the middle of January, just the time that Belmont had returned to Nantes, to hasten his union with Marie.

Our rencontre at the Variétiés, and the fear of discovery, had, doubtless, caused the anxiety Madame Kerouët noticed in his behaviour subsequent to that time.

Thus, had it not been for the note of warning, the *commissaire* and the officer of gendarmerie would have arrested this miserable man on the day of his marriage. And I quite understood that M. Duvallon, the pirate's best man, should have held him up to the eyes of Marie and her aunt in the light of a political victim, in order to deceive them as to the real cause of his arrest.

Did Duvallon know the vile traffic of Belmont, or had he, too, been deceived by him?

All these thoughts and questions rushed confusedly through my mind, and excited me so much that I left the farm much earlier than usual, under the pretext of a headache. Marie and her aunt were annoyed and worried by my sudden departure.

Thus the day, which was to have been a little fête to us, ended very sadly.

What ought I to do?

I love Marie with all the strength of my soul. It would be no crime to carry her off from Belmont, that brigand, that assassin; it would be a noble and generous action.

Marie has been basely deceived. Her family thought they were uniting her to a brave and honest sailor, and not to a vile murderer. This marriage is void, in the name of reason and honour.

It should also be null in the sight of men! This very day I will tell everything to these unhappy women.

But will they believe what I have to say? What proof can I give them of my truthfulness?

And then there would be, in such a denunciation on my part, something low and mean, which is revolting.

After all, Marie is the legitimate wife of Belmont. I am in love with Marie. Such a love almost puts that man on a level with me.

Now it is to be, henceforth, open war between us. I have already the advantage, for he is absent; it would not be fair to augment my chances of success by turning informer. So, finally, if Marie loves me enough to vanquish her scruples to forget her duty towards a man whom she believes to be honest and good, shall I not take more pride in my conquest than if she believed herself only sacrificing a vile creature, who was unworthy of her and who had deceived her, a man that the law might claim as its prey?

Decidedly, I shall say nothing at all.

But suppose that man should return? My God, what a frightful thought!

Marie is his wife after all, and it is only by a extraordinary hazard that she has been saved from being defiled by that infamous man.

My scruples are crazy, are stupid. Why should I hesitate to tell Marie all?

But what good would it do? Would such a disclosure hasten, or would it hinder this man's return?

He may come back at any time.

What shall I do? What shall I do?

SERVAL, 12th December, 18—.

My *incognito* has been discovered, Marie knows who I am.

Yesterday I went to the farm.

I was still irresolute as to what I ought to say in regard to the pirate.

I was talking with Marie and her aunt when my overseer entered.

I became very red, very much embarrassed; the man never noticed it; he made me a low and respectful bow.

"*Tiens*, you know M. Arthur?" asked Madame Kerouët.

"Have I the honour of knowing M. le comte?" repeated the overseer, with surprise.

"M. le comte!" cried out at the same time Marie and her aunt as they rose up with bewildered looks.

Fearing the man would put a bad interpretation on my reasons for hiding my name, I said to him: "You are very stupid, Rivière. I wished to get some information about the state of cultivation of this farm, as I thought of raising the rent, now you have come and spoiled all. Please go and wait for me at Serval, for I want to talk about it with you."

The overseer went out.

"You have deceived us, M. le comte!" said Madame Kerouët to me, with much dignity. "It was very wrong in you."

Marie said not a word, but disappeared without even looking at me.

"And why was it wrong?" said I to that excellent woman. "If I had told you who I was, your scruples would never have allowed you to treat me with such freedom and cordial affection as you have always manifested towards me. I should have remained towards you the master of this farm, and would never have become your friend."

"There can be no safe, no possible friendship except between equals, M. le comte," said Madame Kerouët, with great coolness.

"But in what way are our positions different at the present hour? If my friendship was pleasant to you until now, why should we change our relations? Why should we forget four or five months of charming intimacy?"

"I shall not forget them, M. le comte, but they shall give place to sentiments more suitable to the modest position of Marie and myself."

One of the farm women came then to find Madame Kerouët, and begged her to go to Marie.

She bowed to me respectfully and went out. I left the farm in a violent rage with my overseer.

Then I reflected that, after all, this *incognito* could not be kept up for ever, and, though the discovery might have been a shock to Marie, it certainly would not alter her love for me.

SERVAL, 15th December, 18—.

I have seen Marie once more.

For some days she was sad and distressed at my dissimulation, which she could not understand. She asked why I had thus concealed my name. I told her that,

knowing false and malignant stories had reached her ears, which showed me in the very worst colours, I had preferred being unknown.

It was hard to convince her, but I finally succeeded in chasing all these unhappy impressions from her mind.

Though Madame Kerouët frowns on me sometimes, our intimacy, which for a time was threatened, has resumed all former charm.

SERVAL, 20th December, 18—.

Marie loves me, she loves me, I can no longer have any doubt. May this day remain ever engraved in my heart!

SERVAL, 30th December, 18—.

What a terrible thing has happened! No, no, a thousand times no; she shall not leave me. Now that I have the right to watch over her, never will I abandon her.

This morning a farm servant came over to the château. He brought me a letter from Marie.

She besought me to come to her instantly.

An hour after I was at the farm.

I found Marie and her aunt both in tears.

"What is the matter? What has happened?" I cried out.

"We have had a letter," said Madame Kerouët, "a letter from M. Duvallon; he says that he is coming here to-day to take away Marie, by order of M. Belmont."

"And you would allow her to go?" I exclaimed. "And you, Marie, would you consent to go?"

Marie, pale as death, passed her hands over her eyes and cried out: "What an awakening! *Mon Dieu!* what shall I do? I am lost."

I made an expressive sign to Marie. Her aunt, preoccupied by her own distress, had not heard her.

"Ah, *mon Dieu!*" said Madame Kerouët. "Give up my child! I never will have the strength to do it."

"You shall not give her up, you ought not, good mother! You must not give her up to such a man as Duvallon."

"Alas! monsieur, what objection can we make? Is not M. Duvallon the intimate friend of M. Belmont? Has he not received his orders?"

"It is just because he is the intimate friend of a man like Belmont that you must be on your guard against him."

Marie and Madame Kerouët stared at me with astonishment, but I continued: "Listen to me, you, Madame Kerouët, and you, Marie. Allow me to receive M. Duvallon; I will take it upon myself to make him listen to reason. When do you expect him to arrive?"

"If he comes when he says he will, it will be by the diligence from Bourges. He will get here at three o'clock," said Madame Kerouët.

"Make him no promises, but send him to me, and let us hope for the best."

And on a signal from Marie I went out.

After awhile, at five o'clock, I heard the noise of a *carriole* in the courtyard of the château. I could not repress an exclamation of anger. I felt the blood rush to my face, and my temples throb violently.

M. Duvallon was ushered in.

I beheld a robust man of great height, apparently about sixty years of age. His complexion was high-coloured, his manner impertinent, vulgar, but self-satisfied. He was dressed like a Frenchman on a journey, that is to say, shabbily.

I made him a sign to be seated, and he sat down.

"Monsieur," said I to him, "I beg your pardon for any trouble I may have given you, but I am charged by Madame Kerouët, who leases one of my farms, and who has some confidence in me —"

"*Parbleu!* her niece has confidence in you, too, and

a great deal too much of it!" cried out the man, rudely interrupting me.

"It is true, monsieur," said I, trying to keep my temper, "I have the honour of being one of Madame Belmont's friends."

"And I am one of M. Belmont's friends, monsieur, and as such am commissioned to bring his wife back to him at Nantes, where she will remain under the surveillance of my spouse until the return of her husband, my friend Belmont, which will not be very long."

"You call yourself the friend of Belmont?" said I to Duvallon, staring at him fixedly. "Do you know what that man is?"

"That man, — that man is as good as any other man, *morbleu!*" cried out Duvallon, rising quickly from his seat.

I remained seated.

"That man is a brigand, monsieur! That man is an assassin, monsieur! a murderer!" and I accented with an imperious and resolute nod each one of these charges.

"If you were not in your own house!" said Duvallon to me as he doubled up his fists.

"I am not a child, monsieur, and your threats are ridiculous. Let us speak frankly and have it out. The proof that your friend is an assassin is that I was wounded by him on board of a yacht that he attacked in the Mediterranean; is that clear? The proof that your friend is a brigand is that I was on board of the same yacht, which he villainously wrecked off the coast of the island of Malta; is that clear? And to conclude, the proof that these accusations are true is that the English ambassador to France and the Foreign Office, informed by me of the presence of this wretch in Paris, have taken measures for his arrest, which would have been successful if you, on his wedding day, had not helped him to escape from justice."

Duvallon looked at me stupidly; he bit his lips with rage. I continued:

"Neither Madame Belmont nor her aunt have heard a word of all this, monsieur; but I solemnly declare to you that, if you insist upon carrying away Madame Belmont from her aunt, I will tell them the whole story, and at the same time advise them to seek legal advice, or put this affair in the hands of justice."

"Thousand thunders!" cried out Duvallon, stamping with his foot, "not a word of all that is true. I mean to carry off that wench from under your very nose, *mort-Dieu!* or you will see what will happen."

"If you were not the intimate friend of Belmont, you would pay dearly for your lies and your threat. Leave the room instantly, monsieur."

"I defy you, I dare you to order me out of here!" said the old corsair, as he stepped towards me with a threatening scowl.

But on second thoughts, as he compared his age to my age and his strength to mine, he restrained himself, contenting himself with saying, in a very concentration of fury:

"You mean, then, to raise up yourself in opposition to me, fearing that I will carry off your mistress? Any one can see that. But I have said that I would take her off, and I mean to take her, *mort-Dieu!* Don't you suppose that I know all that has been going on here? Don't I know all about the presents you have made her? And haven't I been getting these letters of thanks from those two foolish women, letters that I could not understand, thanking me for all those fine presents? But it has all come to an end, it has got to stop; do you hear? Belmont is on his way home, and in the meantime I take the demoiselle, whether or no, by force if I must."

Not wishing to answer this man, I rang the bell.

"Pierre," said I to the servant-man, "I wish you to saddle two horses, one for myself and one for George,

who must go with me. I also wish you to tell Lefort to mount his horse, and tell his son to do the same. They are to go to the *ferme des Prés* and wait for me."

The servant went out.

"Now, monsieur," said I to Duvallon, "reflect well on what you are about to do. If you do not instantly quit this part of the country I will tell all to Madame Belmont and her aunt, and shall advise them to put themselves under the protection of the law. I am going immediately to the Field Farm. I shall wait there for you, monsieur, and I shall see if you dare to come."

Then ringing again for Pierre, I said: "Show monsieur out."

Without waiting for a reply from Duvallon, I went out, mounted my horse, and set off for the farm.

Lefort and his son had already started ahead of me.

SERVAL, 31st December, 18—.

Yesterday Duvallon did not dare to come to the farm.

He wrote to Marie telling her that he had gone back to Nantes. The letter was filled with the grossest insults. He threatened her with the return of Belmont.

Marie is plunged in the darkest despair. To-day I was not able to see her.

There is but one thing left for me to do: that is to persuade Marie to follow me.

What can her life be from this time?

If Belmont comes back he will sooner or later be arrested, whether I denounce him or no.

If he is acquitted, he is Marie's master: she is his wife; she will be obliged to go with him.

If he is found guilty, if he is condemned, what a horrible fate for Marie! And what is to become of me? My life belongs to her, as hers does to me.

If she refuses to come with me, what is to be done?

The former crimes of this man will not annul the

marriage, or if they do, what publicity, what disgusting revelations, will Marie have to submit to!

She must do it, she must follow me, it is the only thing she can do.

What has she to keep her here, poor orphan girl?

Her aunt, that excellent woman.

But perhaps she would come with us, — no, no. If she suspected the truth; if she knew that there was between us a sweeter bond than that of friendship, that we belonged to each other for ever and always; if she knew —

No, no! it is not to be thought of.

But will Marie ever consent to leave her?

However, it must be done!

If Marie will follow me, what a future! We would retire to some solitary place, where I would spend the rest of my life at her side.

Though I am young, I have seen so much of life, I have suffered so much, I have learned so much about men and things, and have been so weary of them, that it would be rapture to me, this solitary and peaceful life of trusting love.

And besides she has in herself so many resources that fit her for such a life of isolation: heart, soul, mind, artistic talents, an angelic disposition, adorable simplicity, the imagination of a young girl who can please, occupy, or amuse herself with the veriest trifle.

She must follow me, she will follow me.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE FLIGHT.

SERVAL, 10th March, 18—.

I OPEN again this journal which I have not written a line in for three months.

I wish to write one more date, one last page here at Serval, in this poor old paternal château that I am about to leave, perhaps, for ever.

Strange coincidence! It was here that my mundane life began with my love for Hélène.

It is here my mundane life is to end with my love for Marie.

Henceforth she and I mean to live in the greatest seclusion. Oh, if we are only able to realise our dreams, our life will be one of enchantment.

But by how many cruel trials it will have been purchased.

For three months Marie has been weeping in secret! but little by little I have been able to overcome her resistance.

At last she has consented to fly with me.

Besides, she dare not, she cannot, remain here; she is about to become a mother!

And now, my faithful George, who has been living in Nantes to keep a watch on Duvallon, wrote me this morning that a man I cannot fail to recognise as Belmont arrived last night at the house of the old corsair.

I told Marie of his return, and then she decided.

How would she dare to appear before her husband?

And how could she bear the reproaches of her aunt?

To-morrow night, then, we are to depart secretly.

So as to be sure of no mistakes, let me set down what I have arranged to do.

Send relays of horses before me as far as ——, across the country, so as to leave no traces; it is twenty-five leagues shorter.

Take the mail coach at ——, and in thirty hours we will be at the frontier.

Once outside of France, and the first noise of our elopement calmed, we will wait to see what happens. Perhaps we will return, perhaps Belmont will be arrested.

DOUX REPOS, September, 18—.

You have asked me, Marie, to tell you the story of my whole life.

We have broken off all connection with the world.

Retired from society, here in this peaceful and charming abode, we have been living for two years with our dear child, and ineffably happy.

You have been my angel, my saviour, my god, my love, my only treasure, because you possess all the riches of heart, mind, and soul.

In the midst of our solitude, each day brings a new joy that makes you dearer to my heart.

Thus the pearls of the sea owe their imperishable lustre to the shadows of each succeeding wave.

You often tell me, Marie, that my nature is noble, generous, and, above all, good.

When you will have read this journal of my whole life, Marie, my beautiful and gentle Marie, you will find out that I have often been hard-hearted and wicked.

That goodness for which you praise me, it is to you that I owe it!

Under your holy influence, my beautiful guardian angel, all my bad instincts have disappeared, all my highest sentiments have been exalted; in a word I

have loved you, I love you now as you deserve to be loved.

To love you thus, and to be loved by you, Marie, is to believe oneself the first and noblest of men, to despise glory, ambition, fortune, to feel above them all.

It is to have gone beyond the limits of all possible happiness.

This superhuman happiness would alarm me, had we not purchased it by your sorrow and remorse, poor Marie!

This remorse has been, and still is, your only grief; the time has come to deliver you from it.

You shall be told the truth about the man you married, whom you have believed to be in prison as a political criminal, for these last two years.

Later you will know why I hid this secret from you until now.

These lines which I now write in this journal retrace almost all the events of my life, up to the moment when we quitted Serval together. They will be the last I shall write in it.

Why should I henceforth need such a cold confidant?

It is in your angelic heart, Marie, that I will trace all my thoughts; or, rather, it is there that I will leave the imprint of the perfect bliss that intoxicates me.

You will read this journal, Marie; you will see that I have been very guilty, that I have suffered greatly.

You will read the story of our love from its very inception.

Since leaving Serval I have ceased to write in this journal. What could I have written? Whatever I have said, Marie, will apply to the future years I shall spend with you.

You will not find here the date of the birth of our Arthur, — our child, — the greatest joy of my life. Nor will you find the date of that terrible day on which I trembled for your life, my day of most fearful torture.

While the paroxysm of that unknown joy, of that unknown grief, lasted, I neither thought, reflected, nor acted, I did not exist.

When one still has the consciousness of one's sufferings, when one can contemplate one's own joy, then neither has joy nor sorrow arrived at its highest degree.

I had thus far suffered atrociously. I had experienced the most intense delights, but I had never been so absorbed as to lose self-consciousness, or the power of self-investigation.

I have spoken of an unknown happiness, Marie, and yet the date of the blissful day when I no longer doubted of your love is written in this journal, while the date of our Arthur's birth is not found here.

Your tender soul will understand and appreciate the difference, will it not?

As for our child, Marie, our beautiful and adorable child, we will think of his future, and —

These were the last words of the journal of an unknown.

By looking at the dates, and comparing them with the information given me by the curé of the village of ——, in the first volume, one can see that this last passage must have been written the day or the day before the triple assassination of the count, Marie, and their child, by Belmont, the pirate of Porquerolles, who, having escaped from prison, and knowing the retreat of the count, wished to wreak upon him a terrible vengeance before leaving France for ever.

THE END.

THE SEVEN CARDINAL SINS

INDOLENCE

INDOLENCE.

CHAPTER I.

A CHARMING IDLER.

SHOULD there be any artist who desires to depict *dolce far niente* in its most attractive guise, we think we might offer him as a model, —

Florence de Luceval, six months married, but not quite seventeen, a blonde with a skin of dazzling whiteness, cheeks rivalling the wild rose in hue, and a wealth of golden hair. Though tall and beautifully formed, the young lady is a trifle stout, but the slight superabundance of flesh is so admirably distributed that it only adds to her attractiveness. Enveloped in a soft mull peignoir, profusely trimmed with lace, her attitude is careless but graceful in the extreme, as, half reclining in a luxurious armchair, with her head a little to one side, and her dainty slippered feet crossed upon a big velvet cushion, she toys with a magnificent rose that is lying on her lap.

Thus luxuriously established before an open window that overlooks a beautiful garden, she gazes out through her half closed eyelids upon the charming play of light and shade produced by the golden sunbeams as they pierce the dense shrubbery that borders the walk. At the farther end of this shady path is a fountain where the water in one marble shell overflows into the larger

one below; and the faint murmur of the distant fountain, the twittering of the birds, the soft humidity of the atmosphere, the clearness of the sky, and the balmy fragrance from several beds of heliotrope and huge clumps of Japanese honeysuckle seem to have plunged the fair young creature into a sort of ecstatic trance, in which body and mind are alike held captive by the same delightful lethargy.

While this incorrigible idler is thus yielding to the charm of her habitual indolence, an entirely different scene is going on in an adjoining room.

M. Alexandre de Luceval had just entered his wife's bedchamber. He was a young man about twenty-five years of age, and dark complexioned. Quick, nervous, and lithe in his movements, the natural petulance of his disposition manifested itself in his every gesture. He belonged, in fact, to that class of individuals who are blessed, or afflicted, with a desire to be always on the go, and who are utterly unable to remain for more than a minute in one place, or without busying themselves about something or other. In short, he was a man who seemed to be not only in a dozen places at once, but to be engaged in solving two problems at the same time, — that of perpetual motion and ubiquity.

It was now two o'clock in the afternoon, and M. de Luceval, who had risen with the sun, — he never slept more than four or five hours, — had already traversed half of Paris, either on foot or on horseback. When he entered his wife's bedchamber, one of her women happened to be there, and her employer, in the quick, curt way which was habitual to him, exclaimed:

"Well, has madame returned? Is she dressed? Is she ready?"

"Madame la marquise has not been out this morning, monsieur," replied Mlle. Lise, the maid.

"What! Madame did not go out at eleven o'clock, as she intended?"

"No, monsieur, madame did not rise until half-past twelve."

"Another ride postponed!" muttered M. de Luceval, stamping his foot impatiently.

"But madame is dressed now, of course?" he said aloud.

"Oh, no, monsieur; madame is still in her dressing-gown. Madame told me she had no intention of going out to-day."

"Where is she?" demanded M. de Luceval, with another impatient stamp of the foot; "where is she?"

"In her boudoir, monsieur."

A few seconds afterwards M. de Luceval burst noisily into the room where his pretty wife lay stretched out in her armchair, too comfortable to even turn her head to see who the intruder was.

"Really, Florence, this is intolerable!" exclaimed M. de Luceval.

"What, my dear?" the lady asked, languidly, without moving, and with her eyes still fixed on the garden.

"You ask me that, when you know that we were to go out together at two o'clock!"

"It is entirely too hot."

"But the carriage is ready."

"They can take the horses out, then, I wouldn't move for a kingdom."

"But you will have to. You know perfectly well that it is absolutely necessary we should go out together to-day, particularly as you did not go out earlier, as you ought to have done."

"I really hadn't the courage to get up."

"You will at least have to summon up courage to dress yourself, and at once."

"Don't insist, my dear. It is not of the slightest use."

"You must be jesting."

"Nothing of the sort."

"But the purchases we have to make cannot be put off any longer. My niece's *corbeille* must be completed. It would have been a week ago, but for your indolence."

"You have excellent taste, my dear, attend to the *corbeille* yourself. The mere thought of rushing about from shop to shop, and going up and down stairs, and standing on one's feet for hours at a time, is really too appalling."

"Nonsense, madame! Such indolence in a girl of seventeen is monstrous, disgraceful! It positively amounts to a disease with you. I shall consult Doctor Gasterini about it to-morrow."

"An excellent idea!" said Florence, really arousing herself enough to laugh this time. "The dear doctor is so witty it is sure to be a very amusing consultation."

"I am in earnest, madame. Something must be done to cure you of this apathy."

"I sincerely hope it will prove incurable. You have no idea how much I was enjoying myself before you came in, lying here with half closed eyes, listening to the fountain, and not even taking the trouble to think."

"You dare to admit that?"

"And why not, pray?"

"I don't believe there is another person in the world who can compare with you so far as indolence is concerned."

"You forget your cousin Michel, who, judging from what you say, certainly rivals me in this respect. Possibly it is on this account that he has never taken the trouble to come and see you since your marriage."

"You two are certainly very much alike. I really believe you are more indolent than he is, though. But come, Florence, don't let us have any more nonsense. Dress at once, and let us be off, I beg of you."

"And I, in turn, beg that you will attend to this shopping yourself, my dear Alexandre. If you will, I'll

promise to drive with you in the Bois this evening. We won't go until after dark, so I shall only have to put on a hat and mantle."

"But this is the day of Madame de Mirecourt's reception. She has called on you twice, and you have never set foot in her house, so you really must do me the favour to go there this evening."

"Make an evening toilet? Oh, no, indeed. It is entirely too much trouble."

"That is not the question. One must fulfil one's duties to society, so you will accompany me to Madame de Mirecourt's this evening."

"Society can do without me just as well as I can do without society. Society bores me. I shall not go to Madame de Mirecourt's."

"Yes, you will."

"When I say no, I mean no."

"Zounds, madame —"

"My dear, as I have told you very often, I married so I might get out of the convent, so I might lie in bed as late as I chose in the morning, so I might get rid of lessons, and so I might do nothing as long and as much as I pleased, — so I might be my own mistress, in short."

"You are talking and reasoning like a child, — and like an utterly spoiled child."

"That doesn't matter."

"Ah, your guardian warned me! Why did I not believe him? I had no idea that such a person as you could exist. I said to myself, 'This indolence on the part of a girl of seventeen is nothing but the ennui caused by the monotony of convent life. When she marries, the duties and pleasures of society, the care of her house, and improving travel will cure her of her indolence, and —'"

"Then that is the reason, I suppose, that you had the barbarity to propose a long journey to me only a day or

two after our marriage," interrupted Madame de Luceval, in reproachful tones.

"But, madame, travelling —"

"Don't! The slightest allusion to it positively makes me shudder. A journey is the most fatiguing and disagreeable thing in the world. Think of nights spent in diligences or in horrid inns, and long walks and drives to see the pretended beauties or wonders of a country. I have asked you before, monsieur, not to even mention the subject of travelling to me. I have perfect horror of it."

"Ah, madame, had I foreseen this —"

"I understand; I should not have had the happiness of being Madame de Luceval."

"Say, rather, that I should not have had the misfortune to be your husband."

"A gallant speech after six months of married life, truly."

"But you exasperate me beyond endurance, madame. I am the most unhappy man alive. I can stand it no longer. I must say what I have to say."

"Do, by all means. But pray don't make such a fuss about it. I abhor a noise."

"Very well, then, madame. I tell you very plainly, though very quietly, that it is a woman's duty to attend to the affairs of her household, and you do not pay the slightest attention to yours. If it were not for me, I don't know what would become of the house."

"That is the steward's business, it seems to me. But you have energy enough for two, and you've got to expend it upon something."

"I tell you, again, madame, very quietly, understand, that I anticipated a very different and very delightful life. I had deferred exploring several of the most interesting countries until after my marriage, saying to myself, 'Instead of exploring them alone, I shall then have a charming and congenial companion; fatigue,

adventures, even dangers, — we will share them all courageously together.'"

"Great Heavens!" murmured Florence, lifting her beautiful eyes heavenward, "he admits such an atrocious thing as that."

"'What happiness it will be,' I said to myself," continued M. de Luceval, quite carried away by the bitterness of his regret, — "'what happiness it will be to visit such extremely interesting countries as Egypt — '"

"Egypt!"

"Turkey — "

"*Mon Dieu!* Turkey!"

"And if you had been the woman I so fondly dreamed, we might even have pushed on to the Caucasus."

"The Caucasus!" exclaimed Florence, straightening herself up in her chair this time. "Is it possible you thought of such a thing as visiting the Caucasus?" she added, clasping her pretty hands in undisguised horror.

"But, madame, Lady Stanhope, and the Duchesse de Plaisance, and many others, have made similar journeys."

"The Caucasus! So that was what you reserved for me! That was what you were infamously plotting, when I so trustingly gave you my hand in the Chapel of the Assumption. Ah, I understand the cruel selfishness of your character now."

And sinking back in her armchair again, she repeated, in the same horrified tones:

"The Caucasus! Think of it, the Caucasus!"

"Oh, I know very well now that you are one of those women who are incapable of making the slightest concession to their husband's wishes," retorted M. de Luceval, bitterly.

"The slightest concession! Why don't you propose a voyage of discovery to Timbuctoo, or the North Pole, and be done with it?"

"Madame Biard, the brave-hearted wife of an eminent

painter, had the courage to accompany her husband to the polar seas without a murmur; yes, even gladly, madame," answered M. de Luceval, — "to polar seas, do you hear, madame?"

"I hear only too well, monsieur. You are either the most wicked or the most insane of men!"

"Really, madame —"

"And what and who, in Heaven's name, is keeping you, monsieur? If you have a passion — a mania, I call it — for travelling, if repose is so irksome to you, why don't you travel? Go to the Caucasus! Go to the North Pole, if you like, start at once, make haste about it. We shall both be the gainers by it. I shall no longer distress you by the sight of my atrocious indolence, and you will cease to irritate my nerves by the restlessness that prevents you from remaining for a moment in one place or allowing others to do so. Twenty times a day you rush into my room merely for the sake of coming and going; or, even worse, marvellous as it may appear, you come and wake me at five o'clock in the morning to propose a horseback ride, or to take me to the natatorium. You have even gone so far as to insist upon my practising gymnastics a little. Gymnastics! Who but you would ever think of such a thing? So, monsieur, I repeat that your absurd ideas, your constant coming and going, the sort of perpetual motion you keep up, the spirit of unrest that seems to possess you, causes me quite as much annoyance as my indolence can possibly cause you. Consequently you need not suppose for one moment that you alone have cause to complain, and as we have both made up our minds to say our say to each other, I declare in my turn, monsieur, that such a life as this is intolerable to me, and, unless there is a change for the better, I do not intend to put up with it much longer."

"What do you mean by that, madame?"

"I mean that it would be very foolish for us to go on

interfering with and annoying each other. You have your tastes, I have mine; you have your fortune, I have mine; then let us live as seems good to us, and, for Heaven's sake, let us, above all, live in quiet."

"I admire your assurance, really, madame. It is something marvellous! Do you suppose I married to lead a life that was not to my liking?"

"Oh, *mon Dieu!* live as you please, monsieur, but let me live as I please, as well."

"It pleases me, madame, to live with you. It was for that I married you, I think; so it is for you to accept my sort of life. Yes, madame, I have the right to expect it, ay, to demand it; and you may rest assured that I shall have the energy to enforce my demands."

"What you say is perfectly ridiculous, M. de Luceval."

"Ah, you think so, do you?" retorted the husband, with a sardonic smile.

"Yes, ridiculous in the highest degree."

"Then the Civil Code is ridiculous in the highest degree, I suppose?"

"Very possibly, monsieur, as you bring it into this discussion. I don't know enough about it to judge, however."

"Then understand, once for all, madame, that the Civil Code expressly states that a woman is expected, obliged, compelled to follow her husband."

"To the Caucasus?"

"Wherever he may see fit to take her."

"I am in no mood for jesting, monsieur. But for that, your interpretation of the Civil Code would amuse me immensely."

"I, too, am in earnest, madame, — very much in earnest."

"That is what makes the whole affair so irresistibly comical."

"Take care, madame, do not drive me to desperation."

"Oh, threaten me with the North Pole at once, and let that be the end of it."

"I have no intention of resorting to threats, madame. I merely wish to impress upon your mind the fact that the time for weakness is past, so when it suits me to start on a journey, — and that moment is, perhaps, nearer than you think, — I shall notify you one week in advance, so you may have time to make all needful preparations; then, willing or not, when the post-horses come, you will enter the carriage."

"If not, the magistrate, and a 'In the name of the law, follow your husband,' I suppose, monsieur."

"Yes, madame. You may sneer as much as you please, but you will follow me at the law's bidding, for you must realise that some guaranties in relation to such a serious and sacred thing as marriage must and do exist. After all, a man's happiness and peace of mind must not be at the mercy of the slightest caprice of a spoiled child."

"Caprice! that is ridiculous. I have a horror of travelling, the slightest fatigue is intolerable to me, and because you take it into your head to rival the Wandering Jew, I am to be compelled to follow you?"

"Yes, madame; and I will prove to you that —"

"M. de Luceval, I hate controversy. It is entirely too much trouble. So, to put an end to this discussion, I will merely say that I shall not accompany you on a single one of your journeys, even if it be merely from here to St. Cloud. You shall see if I do not keep my word."

And Florence threw herself back in her armchair again, crossed her little feet, and closed her eyes, as if completely exhausted.

"Madame," exclaimed M. de Luceval, "this is not to be borne. I will not permit this disdainful silence!"

All her husband's efforts to extort a word from

her proved futile, however, and despairing, at last, of overcoming his wife's obstinacy, he departed, in high dudgeon.

M. de Luceval was perfectly sincere in saying what he did, for, being passionately fond of travel himself, he could not believe that his wife really loathed it, and he was the more incredulous on this point as, when he married Florence, he had persuaded himself that a child of sixteen, an orphan, who had spent her life in a convent, could not have much will of her own, and would be delighted to travel. In fact, he had felt certain that such a proposal would prove a delightful surprise to her.

His notary had told him of an orphan girl of sixteen, with a lovely face, an exquisite figure, and a fortune of more than a million francs, which, invested in the business of her guardian, a famous banker, yielded a yearly income of eighty thousand francs. M. de Luceval gave sincere thanks to Heaven and his notary. He saw the young girl, thought her ravishingly beautiful, fell in love with her, married her, and, when the awakening came, he had the simplicity to marvel at the loss of his illusions, and the credulity to believe that right, persistency, threats, force, and the law would have some effect upon the will of a woman who entrenches herself in a passive resistance.

A few minutes after M. de Luceval had taken his departure, Lise, the maid, entered the room with a rather frightened air, and said to her mistress:

"A lady, who says her name is Madame d'Infreville, is down at the door, in a carriage."

"Valentine!" exclaimed the young marquise, in accents of joyful surprise. "It is ages since I saw her. Ask her to come up at once."

"But that is impossible, madame."

"And why?"

"The lady sent, through the concierge, for madame's

maid. Some one told me and I went down at once. When I got there, the lady, who was frightfully pale, said to me: 'Mademoiselle, go to Madame de Luceval and ask her to have the goodness to come down here for a moment. I want to speak to her on a very important matter. Tell her that my name is Madame d'Infreville, — Valentine d'Infreville.'"

Lise had scarcely uttered these words before a footman entered the room, after having knocked, and said to Florence:

"Will madame la marquise see Madame d'Infreville?"

"What!" exclaimed Florence, greatly surprised at this sudden change in her friend's resolution, "is Madame d'Infreville here?"

"Yes, madame."

"Then show her in at once," said Madame de Luceval, rising to meet her friend, whom she embraced affectionately, and with whom she was a moment afterwards left alone.

CHAPTER II.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

VALENTINE D'INFREVILLE was three years older than Madame de Luceval, and a striking contrast to her in every way, though equally beautiful and attractive.

Tall, lithe, and slender, without being thin, and a decided brunette in colouring, — she had beautiful eyes, full of fire, and black as her long, luxuriant hair, and rich scarlet lips, shaded by the slightest suspicion of down, while her thin nostrils, which quivered and dilated with the slightest emotion, the excessive mobility of her features, her animated gestures, and even the rather virile timbre of her contralto voice, all indicated that she was the possessor of an ardent and impassioned nature. She had first met Florence at the Convent of the Sacred Heart, where they had become very intimate. Valentine had left the convent to be married a year before her friend, and though she afterwards came to see Florence several times at the convent, for several months prior to her marriage with M. de Luceval, Florence, to her great surprise, had seen nothing of her friend, and since that time their intercourse had been confined to a correspondence which had been very irregular on the part of Madame d'Infreville, who was, she declared, absorbed with household cares; so the two friends had not seen each other for more than six months.

Madame de Luceval, after having tenderly embraced her friend, noticed her unusual pallor as well as her extreme agitation, and asked, anxiously:

"Valentine, what is the matter? My maid told me first that you wished to see me, but that you did not want to come in."

"I seem to have lost my head completely, Florence. I am nearly mad, I believe."

"You frighten me. Explain, for pity's sake!"

"Florence, will you save me from a terrible misfortune?"

"Speak, speak! Am I not your friend, though you have deserted me for the last six months?"

"I did very wrong. I have been unkind and ungrateful, I know, and yet I appeal to you now."

"It is the only way to gain my forgiveness."

"Always the same generous Florence!"

"But now tell me, quick, what can I do for you?"

"Have you writing materials here?"

"Over there on that table."

"Then write what I dictate, I beg of you. It may save me."

"This paper has my initials on it. Does that make any difference?"

"On the contrary, it is all the better, as you are the person who is supposed to be writing to me."

"Go on, then, Valentine. I am ready."

So Madame d'Infreville dictated the following in a strangely altered voice, pausing now and then, so great was her emotion.

"'The recollection of the pleasant hours we spent together yesterday is so delightful, my dear Valentine, — though I really can not say that it was in any respect a more charming day than last Wednesday, — that at the risk of seeming both selfish and importunate, I am going to ask you to give me Sunday.'"

"Give me Sunday," repeated Florence, greatly surprised at this beginning.

"'Our programme shall be the same,'" continued

Madame d'Infreville. "Underline programme," she added, with a bitter smile, then resumed:

"'Our *programme* shall be the same: breakfast at eleven, a stroll in the garden, embroidery, music, and conversation until seven o'clock, then dinner and afterwards a drive in the Bois de Boulogne in an open carriage if the evening is fine, after which I shall take you home at ten o'clock as I did yesterday.

"'Answer me yes or no, but let it be a yes, and you will make very happy your devoted

"'FLORENCE.'"

"Your devoted Florence," repeated Madame de Luceval; then, with a half smile, she added: "It is certainly cruel in you, Valentine, to dictate such a programme to excite my envy and regret; but the time for reproaches or explanations will come presently. I will have my revenge then. Is that all, my dear Valentine?"

"Put my address on the note, seal it, and have it sent to my house at once."

Madame de Luceval was about to ring when she paused as if a new thought had suddenly struck her, and she said to her friend, with some slight embarrassment:

"Valentine, I do hope you will not take offence at what I am about to say to you."

"Go on."

"If I am not mistaken, the object of this letter is to make some one suppose that we have spent several days together recently."

"Yes, yes, that is it exactly. Well, what of it?"

"In that case, I think it advisable to tell you that my husband is unfortunately endowed with such a prodigious amount of energy and activity that, though he is almost always out of the house, he nevertheless finds a way to be almost always in my room; in fact, he rushes in and out about a dozen times a day, so if his testimony should

be invoked, he would be sure to say that he had never seen you here."

"I foresaw this difficulty, but of two dangers, one must choose the least. Send this letter without delay, I beg of you, by one of your servants; but no, he might talk. You had better entrust it to the post. It will arrive in time, even then."

Madame de Luceval rang the bell.

A footman answered the summons.

His mistress was about to give him the letter, but she changed her mind and asked instead:

"Is Baptiste here?"

"Yes, madame la marquise."

"Send him to me at once."

"Why this servant instead of the other, Florence?" inquired Madame d'Infreville.

"The other man knows how to read. He is rather inquisitive, too, and he might think it singular that I wrote to you while you were here. The man I sent for cannot read, and is very stupid besides, so there is very little danger to apprehend from him."

"You are right, a thousand times right, Florence. In my excitement, I did not think of all this."

"Did madame la marquise send for me?" inquired Baptiste, appearing in the doorway.

"Do you know the flower girl that has a shop near the Chinese bath-house?" inquired Florence.

"Yes, madame la marquise."

"Go there at once, and buy me two large bunches of Parma violets."

"Yes, madame."

The man turned to go.

"Oh, I forgot," exclaimed Madame de Luceval, calling him back. "I want you to post this letter on your way."

"Has madame any other commissions?"

"No."

So Baptiste departed.

Madame d'Infreville understood and appreciated her friend's generosity in thus making herself an accessory to the deed.

"Thank you, thank you, my dearest Florence," she exclaimed, gratefully. "Heaven grant that your kindness may not prove unavailing."

"I hope it may not, indeed, but — "

"Florence, listen to me. The only way I can prove my gratitude for the great service you have just rendered me is to place myself at your mercy, — in other words, to conceal nothing from you. I ought to have done that at first, and then explained the object of this letter, instead of exacting this proof of your devotion and friendship; but I admit that I was afraid you would refuse my request and blame me when you learned that — "

Then, after a moment's hesitation, Valentine said, resolutely, though she blushed deeply up to her very eyes:

"Florence, I have a lover."

"I suspected as much, Valentine."

"Do not condemn me without a hearing, I beseech you."

"My poor Valentine, I remember only one thing, — the confidence you have shown in me."

"Ah, but for my mother, I would not have stooped to this trickery and falsehood. I would have borne all the consequences of my wrong-doing, for I, at least, have the courage of my actions, but in my mother's present precarious condition of health, a scandal would kill her. Oh, Florence, though I am culpable, I am also very miserable," exclaimed Madame d'Infreville, bursting into tears, and throwing herself in her friend's arms.

"Calm yourself, I beseech you, Valentine," said the young marquise, though she shared her companion's emotion. "Trust to my sincere affection, and open

your heart to your friend. It will at least be some consolation to you."

"My only hope is in your affection. Yes, Florence, I feel and know that you love me; that conviction alone gives me courage to make this painful confession. But, stay, there is another confession which I wish to have off my mind first. If I have come, after a long estrangement, to ask this great favour of you, it is not only because I counted blindly upon your friendship, but because, of all the women of my acquaintance, you are the only one my husband never visits. Now, listen to me: When I married M. d'Infreville, you were still in the convent. You were still a young girl, and my natural reserve prevented me from telling you many things,—among them, the fact that I married without love."

"Like myself," murmured Florence.

"The marriage pleased my mother, and assured me a large fortune, consequently I unfortunately yielded to my mother's persuasions all the more readily as I, too, was dazzled by the advantages of such a position; so I married M. d'Infreville, without realising, alas! what grievous obligations I was incurring, and at what a price I was selling my liberty. Though I have abundant cause to complain of my husband, my own wrong-doing prevents any recrimination on my part. Without trying to excuse my own weakness, I will endeavour to state the facts of the case, clearly and impartially. M. d'Infreville, though he should be in his prime, is a valetudinarian, because, in his youth, he plunged into all sorts of excesses. He is morose, because he regrets the past; imperious and stern, because he has no heart. In his eyes, I have never been anything but a penniless young girl, whom he condescended to marry in order to make a sort of nurse out of me, and for a long time I accepted this rôle, and performed the duties it involved religiously,—this rôle which was not only so trying but also so humiliating and disgraceful, because the attentions I

paid my husband were not from the heart; and too late, alas! I realised how vile my conduct had been."

"Valentine—"

"No, Florence, no, the term is none too severe. I married M. d'Infreville without love. I married him because he was rich. I sold myself to him, body and soul, and such conduct is vile and disgraceful, I tell you."

"You blame yourself too much, Valentine. You were not thinking as much about yourself as you were about your mother, I am sure."

"And my mother was less solicitous about herself than about me. M. d'Infreville's wealth made filial deference on my part only too easy. At first, I was resigned to my fate, at least in a measure. After our marriage, my husband's health was so poor as to confine him to the house most of the time; but after a few months had elapsed, a marked change for the better became apparent in his condition, thanks to my nursing, perhaps; but from that time his habits, too, underwent an entire change. I saw him but seldom; he was scarcely ever at home, and I soon heard that he had a mistress."

"Poor Valentine!"

"A woman known to all Paris. My husband gave her a magnificent establishment, and made so little effort to conceal his relations with her that I learned all the particulars of the scandalous affair through public hearsay. I ventured to remonstrate with M. d'Infreville, not from any feeling of jealousy, Heaven knows! but I begged him, out of consideration for me, to have a little more regard for appearances. Even these very temperate reproaches irritated my husband, and he asked me, in the most insolent and disdainful manner, what right I had to meddle in this matter. He reminded me that I was indebted to him for a lot to which I could not otherwise have aspired, and that, as he had married me without a dowry, I had no right to make the slightest complaint."

"Why, this conduct was shameful, infamous!"

"'But, as you so flagrantly fail in your duty, monsieur, what would you say if I should forget mine?' I asked.

"'There is no comparison to be made between you and me,' he replied. 'I am the master; it is your duty to obey. You owe everything to me; I owe you nothing. Fail in your duty, and I will turn you out into the street, — you and your mother, who lives upon my charity.'"

"Such insolence and cruelty are inconceivable!"

"A wise and commendable inspiration seized me. I went to my mother, resolved to separate from my husband, and never to return to his house. 'But what will become of me?' said my mother. 'Sick and infirm as I am, poverty means death to me. Besides, my poor child, a separation is impossible. Your husband has a right to do this, so long as he does not bring this woman where you are; and as the law is on his side, and as he needs you, and is accustomed to your care and attentions when he is ill, he will not hear of a separation, and you will be obliged to remain with him. So make the best of it, my poor child. His infatuation for this creature will not last long. Sooner or later, your husband will return to you. Your patience and resignation will touch him; besides, he is in such poor health that this unfortunate affair is sure to be his last, so go on doing exactly as you have done in the past. In such cases, believe me, my child, a good woman suffers and waits and hopes.'"

"What! your mother dared to — "

"Do not censure her too severely, Florence. She has such a horror of poverty, quite as much on my account as on her own. Besides, does not her advice conform in every respect with reason, the law, and the opinion of the world in general?"

"What you say is only too true, alas!"

"Ah, well, so be it, I said to myself bitterly. All possibility of a self-respecting, rightful revolt against this disgraceful state of things being denied me, marriage becomes only a degrading servitude henceforth. I accept it. I shall experience all the degradation of a slave, but I will also practise a slave's perfidy and trickery. After all, degradation of soul has one advantage. It annihilates all remorse; it banishes every scruple. From this on, I will shut my eyes, and instead of struggling against the tide which is sweeping me on to ruin, I will yield myself to it."

"What do you mean?"

"It is now, Florence, that I need all your friendly indulgence. Up to this time I have deserved some interest and sympathy, perhaps, but now —"

The conversation was here interrupted by the entrance of Madame de Luceval's maid.

"What do you want?" asked Florence, impatiently.

"Here is a letter a messenger just brought from M. de Luceval, madame."

"Give it to me."

After having read it, Florence turned to her friend and said: "M. de Luceval informs me that he will not dine at home, so can you not spend the afternoon and take dinner with me?"

"I accept your invitation with pleasure, my dear Florence," Madame d'Infreville replied, after a moment's reflection.

"Madame d'Infreville will dine with me," said Madame de Luceval, turning to her maid. "Give the servants to understand that I am at home to no one, — absolutely no one."

"Yes, madame," replied Mlle. Lise, quitting the room.

CHAPTER III.

A CONFERENCE.

We will leave the two ladies for a time and give our attention to M. de Luceval. This gentleman, as we have just learned through his message to his wife, did not intend to dine at home that day.

The reason was this:

He had, as we know, left Madame de Luceval in a towering rage. He was also firmly resolved to insist upon his rights, and to force her to submit to his will, as well as to his mania for travelling.

He had gone only a few steps from his house before he was accosted by a rather distinguished looking man about forty-five years of age, whose worn and haggard features bore the lines and the impress of a premature old age. As M. de Luceval approached, this gentleman's stern, arrogant face took on an expression of formal courtesy, and, bowing with great politeness, he inquired:

"Is it to M. de Luceval that I have the honour of speaking?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"I was on my way to your house to tender you both my apologies and my thanks."

"Before accepting either, may I not at least know, monsieur —"

"Who I am? Pardon me, monsieur, for not having told you sooner. I am M. d'Infreville, so my name is not unknown to you, I think."

"We have several mutual friends, I think," replied M.

de Luceval, "and I congratulate myself upon my good fortune in meeting you personally, monsieur. But we are only a short distance from my house, and if you will return with me —"

"I could not think of giving you that trouble, monsieur. Besides, to tell the truth, I should be almost afraid to meet Madame de Luceval."

"And why, monsieur?"

"The fact is, I have wronged madame so deeply, monsieur, that I must beg you to make my excuses to her before I have the honour to be presented to her."

"Pardon me," said Florence's husband, more and more mystified, "but I really do not understand —"

"I will explain more clearly, monsieur. But we are almost at the Champs Élysées. If agreeable to you, suppose we have a little chat together as we walk along."

"Certainly, if you prefer that."

And M. de Luceval, who manifested the same energy in his walk that he did in everything else, began to stride along, accompanied, or rather followed, by M. d'Infreville, who found it extremely difficult to keep up with his more agile companion. Nevertheless, continuing the conversation, he said, in a rather panting fashion:

"Just now, monsieur, when I had the honour to tell you my name, and to add that it was probably not unknown to you, you replied that we had mutual friends, and I — But pardon me, I have a favour to ask of you, monsieur," said M. d'Infreville, entirely out of breath now.

"What is it, monsieur?"

"I must ask you to walk a little more slowly. My lungs are not very strong, and I get out of breath very quickly, as you see."

"On the contrary, monsieur, it is I who should beg you to excuse me for walking so fast. It is a bad habit

of which I find it very difficult to break myself; besides, if you prefer it, we can sit down. Here are some chairs."

"I accept the proposition with pleasure, monsieur," said M. d'Infreville, sinking into a chair, "with very great pleasure."

The two gentlemen having established themselves comfortably, M. d'Infreville remarked:

"Permit me to say, monsieur, that you must also have heard of me through some other intermediary than mutual friends."

"To what intermediary do you refer, monsieur?"

"To Madame de Luceval."

"My wife?"

"Certainly, monsieur, for though I have not yet had the honour of an introduction to her, — as I remarked a few minutes ago, — my wife is so intimate with your wife that you and I cannot be strangers to each other. The friendship of the ladies began at the convent, and still continues, as they see each other almost daily, and —"

"Pardon me, monsieur, but I think there must be some mistake —"

"Some mistake?"

"Or rather, some misunderstanding in regard to names."

"And why, monsieur?"

"I seldom leave Madame de Luceval. She receives very few people, and I have never had the pleasure of seeing Madame d'Infreville in my house."

It seemed as if Valentine's husband could not believe his own ears, for, turning to his companion, he exclaimed, hoarsely:

"Do you mean to say, monsieur — ?"

"That I have never had the honour of seeing Madame d'Infreville in my house."

"But that is impossible, monsieur. My wife is with your wife almost constantly."

"But I repeat that I have never seen Madame d'Infreville in my house, monsieur."

"Never?" exclaimed Valentine's husband, so completely stupefied that M. de Luceval gazed at him in astonishment, and said:

"So, as I remarked a short time ago, there must be some mistake in regard to the name, as you tell me that your wife visits my wife every day."

M. d'Infreville's face had become livid. Big drops of sweat stood out upon his forehead, and a bitter smile contracted his bluish lips, but controlling himself, — for he was resolved to act the part of a gentleman in the presence of this stranger, — he responded in a sardonic tone:

"Fortunately, all this is between husbands, my dear sir; and we ought to feel a little compassion for each other, for, after all, each has his turn at it, as one never knows what may happen."

"What do you mean, monsieur?"

"Ah, my vague distrust was only too well founded," murmured M. d'Infreville, in a sort of sullen rage. "Why did I not discover the truth sooner? Oh, these women, these miserable women!"

"Once more, may I beg you to explain, monsieur."

"You are an honourable man, monsieur," replied M. d'Infreville, in an almost solemn tone, "and I trust to your loyalty, sure that you will not refuse to aid me in my efforts to ferret out and punish an infamous crime, for now I understand everything. Oh, these women, these women!"

M. de Luceval, fearing his companion's exclamations would attract the attention of several persons who were sitting a little distance from them, was endeavouring to calm him, when it so chanced that he caught sight of the footman Florence had sent out to mail her letter.

Seeing this man sauntering along with a letter which had, doubtless, been written by Florence immediately

after the lively altercation with her husband, M. de Luceval, yielding to an almost irresistible impulse, called the servant to him, and asked:

"Where are you going?"

"I am going to buy some violets for madame la marquise, and post this letter," he replied, showing the missive to his master as he spoke.

That gentleman took it, and could not repress a movement of surprise as his eye fell upon the address, then, recovering himself, he dismissed the servant by a gesture, saying at the same time:

"You can go. I will take charge of the letter."

The footman having taken his departure, M. de Luceval turned to Valentine's husband, and remarked:

"A strange presentiment, but one which did not deceive me, I find, impelled me to secure this letter. It proves to be one which my wife has written to Madame d'Infreville."

"Why, in that case, my wife and your wife must at least keep up a correspondence," exclaimed Valentine's husband, more hopefully.

"True, but I discover this fact to-day for the first time, monsieur."

"Monsieur, I implore you, I adjure you, to open this letter. It is addressed to my wife. I will assume the whole responsibility."

"Here is the letter; read it, monsieur," responded M. de Luceval, quite as eager to know the contents of the missive as M. d'Infreville.

The latter gentleman, after hastily perusing the note, exclaimed:

"Read it, monsieur. It is surely enough to drive one mad, for in this letter your wife reminds my wife of the delightful day they spent together yesterday, as well as last Wednesday, and begs her to come again on Sunday."

"And I assure you, upon my word of honour, monsieur," responded M. de Luceval, after having perused

"'*Here is the letter; read it, monsieur.*'"

Original etching by Adrian Marcel.

the note in his turn, "that yesterday my wife did not get up until noon, that about three o'clock, I, with no little difficulty, succeeded in persuading her to take a drive with me. We returned a short time before dinner, and after dinner two friends of ours spent the evening with us. As regards Wednesday, I remember perfectly that I was in and out of my wife's room a number of times, and I again assure you, upon my word of honour, that Madame d'Infreville did not spend the day at our house."

"Then, how do you explain this letter, monsieur?"

"I do not explain it, monsieur. I merely confine myself to a plain statement of the facts of the case. I am as much interested in clearing up this mystery as you can possibly be."

"Oh, I will have my revenge!" exclaimed M. d'Infreville, his long repressed rage bursting forth at last. "I can doubt no longer now. The discovery that my wife has been absenting herself from home for days at a time naturally aroused my suspicions. I inquired the cause of these frequent and prolonged absences; she replied that she often went to spend the day with a former schoolmate, named Madame de Luceval. The name was so widely known and respected, the excuse so plausible, my wife's manner so sincere, that I, like a fool, believed her. Now, I know that it was an instinctive distrust that impelled me to seek you out. You see what I have discovered. Oh, the infamous wretch!"

"Be calm, I beg of you," entreated M. de Luceval, "your excited manner is attracting attention. Let us take a cab, and drive to my house at once, monsieur, for this mystery must be cleared up. I shudder to think that my wife, impelled by a desire to protect her friend, has consented to become an accomplice in a shameful deception. Come, monsieur, come. I count upon you, and you, in turn, can count upon me. It is the duty of all honest men to aid and sustain each other under such

distressing circumstances. Justice must be done, and the guilty must be punished."

"Yes, yes. I will have my revenge! You may be sure I will have my revenge!"

He was trembling with rage, and his excitement increased his weakness to such an extent that he was obliged to lean heavily upon his companion's supporting arm to reach the carriage.

It was about an hour after this chance meeting of the two gentlemen that Florence received the note from her husband announcing that he would not dine at home that day.

So while this matrimonial storm is becoming more and more threatening, we will return to the two ladies who were left alone together after the departure of the maid who had brought M. de Luceval's note.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CONFESSION.

THE maid had no sooner quitted the apartment than Madame d'Infreville said to her friend:

"You proposed I should spend the rest of the day here, my dear Florence, and I accept your offer, so as to give a semblance of truth to my falsehood in case there should be any trouble."

"But my letter?"

"It will be supposed that the letter and I passed each other on the way, and that I reached here after the missive was sent."

"True."

"And now, my dear friend, grant me your indulgence, and perhaps, too, your compassion, while I tell you the rest of my sad story."

"Compassion, indulgence! Surely you feel that you can count upon both, my poor Valentine! But go on. I am listening."

"I have never told you that the windows of my bedroom, which is in the second story of M. d'Infreville's house, overlook a small garden which belongs to the ground floor of the adjoining house. About three months before I discovered that my husband had a mistress, and while he was still in a precarious state of health, the garden, as well as the apartments I speak of, — which had been vacant for a long time, — underwent numerous changes. I spent most of my time at home, my husband's ill health preventing me from going out

at all. It was the beginning of summer. In order that I might enjoy more privacy when M. d'Infreville did not need my care, I often retired to my own room, and sewed or embroidered by the open window. The weather was delightful, and I began to notice with great interest the extensive improvements that were being made in the neighbouring garden. As I said a moment ago, they were peculiar changes, but they indicated so much originality, as well as good taste, that my curiosity gradually became much excited, especially as I saw all these changes effected without ever catching a glimpse of the new inmate of the neighbouring *rez-de-chaussée*. It was interesting to watch the transformation of this rather neglected, commonplace garden into a place of ravishing beauty. A conservatory filled with rare plants, and communicating with one of the rooms, was built along the south wall; the opposite wall was concealed from view by a grotto built of large rocks intermingled with shrubbery. A tiny waterfall trickled down one side of this rocky grotto into a big basin below, diffusing a refreshing coolness around; and finally, a sort of rustic summer-house, roofed with thatch and divided into arches, was constructed against the other side of the wall which enclosed this garden, which was soon so filled with flowers that, seen from my window, it resembled one gigantic bouquet. You will understand presently why I enter into these details."

"But this ravishing spot in the heart of Paris was a veritable paradise!"

"It was, indeed, a charming spot. A gilded aviary, filled with magnificent birds, was placed in the middle of the grass plot, and a sort of veranda or broad covered gallery was built in front of the windows, and furnished with rattan couches, Turkish divans, and costly rugs. A piano, too, was placed there, and this broad piazza, protected by Venetian blinds during the day, if necessary, made a delightfully cool and shady retreat in summer."

"Really, it seems to be a tale from the Arabian Nights that I am listening to! What a clever person it must have been who could gather together so many marvels of good taste and comfort in so small a space. But did the originator never show himself?"

"He did not appear until after all these arrangements had been completed."

"But hadn't you endeavoured to find out who this mysterious neighbour was? I confess that I couldn't have resisted the temptation to do so."

Valentine smiled sadly as she replied:

"It so happened that the sister of M. d'Infreville's steward was my mysterious neighbour's only servant. Informed by her brother, this woman had told her employer of this apartment and garden. One day, my curiosity so far got the better of me that I asked our steward if he knew who had just leased the ground floor in the next house, and he told me several things that excited my curiosity still more."

"Indeed, and what were these things, my dear Valentine?"

"He said that this new neighbour was the best and most generous-hearted man in the world, — for instance, when, after the death of an uncle who left him quite a handsome fortune, he wanted to hire several servants, and live in a rather more luxurious fashion, this same old woman whom I have spoken of, and who used to be his nurse, told him, with tears in her eyes, that she could not endure the thought of seeing other servants in his house. In vain he promised her that she should have authority over them all, act as a sort of confidential servant or housekeeper in short, but she would not listen to him. In his kindness of heart, he did not insist, so, in spite of his newly acquired wealth, he kept in his service only this old servant. This may seem a trivial incident to you, my dear Florence, but — "

"On the contrary, I think the delicate consideration

he displayed extremely touching, and not unfrequently these apparent trifles enable one to judge very accurately of a person's character."

"I think so, too. In fact, from that time, I felt sure that my neighbour was both kind-hearted and generous. I soon discovered, too, that his name was Michel Renaud."

"Michel Renaud? Good Heavens!" exclaimed Madame de Luceval.

"Yes; but what is the matter, Florence?"

"How strange, how passing strange that —"

"Pray go on."

"Is he the son of General Renaud, who was killed in the last war of the Empire?"

"Yes. Do you know him?"

"He is M. de Luceval's cousin."

"Michel, M. de Luceval's cousin?"

"And hardly a day passes that my husband does not speak of him."

"Of Michel?"

"Yes, but I have never seen him. Possibly he took offence on account of M. de Luceval's marriage, like nearly all the members of the family, for he has never called to see us. That doesn't surprise me much, however, for my husband has never been on particularly friendly terms with any of his relatives."

"What you say amazes me! Michel, your husband's cousin? But how does M. de Luceval happen to speak of Michel so often?"

"Alas! my poor Valentine, it is on account of a grievous fault of which M. Michel Renaud and I are both guilty, it seems, — a fault which is my chief happiness, and, to speak plainly, my husband's greatest safeguard; but men are so blind!"

"Explain, I beg of you."

"You know I was considered incorrigibly indolent at the convent. How many remonstrances, how

many punishments I received on account of that fault!"

"True."

"Well, this fault seems to increase with age,—it has attained truly colossal proportions now, so colossal, in fact, that it has become almost a virtue."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that, far from experiencing any desire to imitate them, I feel only the greatest pity and compassion for those unfortunate women whom a mad love of society plunges into a whirlpool of gaiety and dissipation. The mere thought of the tiresome, unsatisfactory, wearing manner in which they enjoy themselves makes me shudder. Think of attending three or four balls or receptions every evening, to say nothing of the play; of rushing madly from one's dressmaker to one's milliner, and from there to one's florist; of dressing and undressing oneself, and of trying on gowns, and having one's hair arranged; of making three toilets a day, and dancing and riding and waltzing from morning till night. One must have nerves of steel, and the constitution of a prize-fighter to stand such a fatiguing life. How different all this is from the delightful rest I enjoy on this armchair, finding inexpressible enjoyment in my languid contemplation of earth and sky. When winter comes, I find myself equally happy half dozing in my armchair, or nestling under my eider-down quilt while the hail dashes against the window-panes. I thus enjoy all the varying charms of *dolce far niente* at all seasons of the year, thinking and dreaming, sometimes awake, sometimes half asleep. I am quite capable, I must admit, of spending an entire day stretched out on the grass, watching the passing clouds, listening to the sighing of the wind, the buzzing of the insects, and the soft murmur of the brooklet,—in short, my dear Valentine, no savage denizen of the forest ever appreciated the infinite delight of a free and idle life more keenly than I do, and never was there

a person more devoutly grateful to Heaven who has provided such simple and innocent enjoyment for us. But what is the matter, Valentine?" asked Madame de Luceval, gazing at her friend in surprise. "What is the meaning of these troubled looks, this emotion which you cannot conceal, try as you will? Valentine, once more I entreat you, answer me."

A brief silence followed this appeal, after which Madame d'Infreville, passing her hand across her forehead, replied, in a slightly constrained voice:

"Listen to the conclusion of my story, Florence, and you will, perhaps, divine what I cannot and dare not tell you."

"Speak, then, I beg of you."

"The first time I saw Michel," Valentine continued, "he was on the veranda I told you about. He spent most of his time there during the summer. Concealed from view by my window-shutter, I could examine him at my leisure, and it would be difficult to conceive of a handsomer man. Half reclining on a Turkish divan, enveloped in a long robe of India silk, he was smoking a narghile in an attitude of Oriental *abandon*, with his eyes fixed upon his garden. After listening awhile with evident delight to the murmur of the waterfall, and the singing of the beautiful birds in his aviary, he picked up a book, which he laid down again now and then, as if to think over what he had just read. Soon two of his friends dropped in. One of them is justly considered one of the most eminent men of the day. It was M. M——"

"You are right. He is one of the most brilliant and famous men of his time. I know him by sight and by reputation, and his exalted position, as well as the great difference in age between Michel and himself, make his visit to a rather obscure young man certainly very extraordinary. Did M. Michel seem to be very much flattered by this visit?"

"On the contrary, Michel welcomed him with affectionate familiarity. It seemed to me that M. M—— treated him on a footing of perfect equality. A long conversation ensued, of which I, of course, could not hear a word. To compensate for this disappointment, I took an opera-glass, and from my place of concealment studied Michel's face closely during the interview. I could even watch the movements of his lips. I found a singular charm in this close scrutiny, and though I, of course, had no idea concerning the subject of the conversation, I could see that an animated discussion was going on between M—— and Michel. At first, M—— seemed to be arguing his point in the most energetic manner, but subsequently I saw, by the expression of his face, that he was gradually becoming a convert to Michel's opinion, though not without a stubborn resistance on his part. Nevertheless, an involuntary sign of assent occasionally testified to the advantage Michel was gaining, and he finally won a complete victory. I cannot describe the charm of your cousin's features during this long contest. By their mobility, as well as by the animation of his gestures, I could see that he was employing, in turn, fervid eloquence, keen raillery, and weighty arguments, to refute the statements of his guests and convert them to his way of thinking. The interview lasted a long time; when it was ended, Michel's friends took leave of him with even greater cordiality. He made a movement as if to rise and accompany them to the door, but they, laughingly, compelled him to retain his half recumbent attitude, apparently telling him that they knew what a terrible effort it would be for him to move. I learned afterwards that M——, being obliged to make a very important decision, had come — as he was frequently in the habit of doing — to consult Michel, whose tact is as unerring as his judgment is sound. From that day, my dear friend, though I had never even spoken to Michel, I felt a deep interest in him, which, alas,

was fated to exert entirely too great an influence on my life."

The young woman remained silent for a moment.

As her friend proceeded, Florence had become more and more interested in the story and its hero, especially as she noted the many points of similarity between that gentleman's tastes and character and her own, for M. de Luceval, in reverting to his cousin Michel's incurable indolence, had never said anything that would serve to excuse it or imbue it with any romantic charm. And Florence also understood now the surprise, and, perhaps, even the feeling of involuntary jealousy that Valentine had not been able to entirely conceal when she, Florence, had expounded her ingenious theory on the subject of indolence and its delights.

Not that Madame d'Infreville was really jealous of Madame de Luceval; that would have been the height of folly. Florence did not even know Michel Renaud, and she was too sincere in her friendship to desire to make his acquaintance with the intention of alienating him from her friend.

Nevertheless, Madame d'Infreville experienced a sort of vague envy and uneasiness as she thought of all the elements of sympathy and happiness which were combined in the strange similarity of character which she now perceived in Florence and Michel Renaud.

CHAPTER V.

COUNTERPARTS.

MADAME DE LUCEVAL, after having remained silent and thoughtful for a moment, remarked to her friend:

"I can easily understand the deep impression that the incidents of the day on which you saw Cousin Michel for the first time must have made upon you. You saw that he was remarkably handsome and that he was also highly gifted, as he seemed to exercise such an influence over one of the most famous men of our time, while the delicate consideration shown to his old nurse proved conclusively that his was a most generous heart. This, alas! was enough, and more than enough, my poor Valentine, to excite the interest and admiration of a person so unfortunately situated as yourself."

"Then, Florence, though you may not excuse, you can at least understand how such a passion as this was born in my heart."

"I can not only understand, but excuse it, in one so crushed with grief and disappointment. Your situation was so trying that it was only natural that you should endeavour to divert and console yourself."

"I scarcely need tell you, then, that I thought of Michel all that night in spite of myself. Early the next morning I ran to my window, and gazed eagerly out through the protecting blinds. The day was superb, and Michel spent it as he had spent the previous day, stretched out upon a couch on the veranda, smoking, reading, dreaming, and enjoying to the full the happiness

of being alive, as he told me afterwards. During the day, a man dressed in black, and carrying a large portfolio under his arm, visited him. Thanks to my lorgnette I soon discovered that he was Michel's man of affairs. In fact, he drew several papers from his portfolio, apparently with the intention of reading them to Michel, but the latter took them and signed them without even taking the trouble to glance over them, after which the visitor drew from his pocket a roll of bank-notes, which he handed to your cousin, apparently with the request that he would count them, which he refused to do, thus showing his blind confidence in this man."

"All of which goes to prove that our dear cousin is very careless in business matters."

"Alas! that is only too true, unfortunately for him."

"What! is his fortune — ?"

"You shall know all if you will give me your attention a few minutes longer. During the day, which was spent in complete idleness, like the one which had preceded it, Michel's nurse brought him a letter. He read it. Ah, Florence, never have I seen compassion so touchingly depicted upon any human face. He opened the desk in which he had placed the bank-notes, and handed one to his nurse. The good woman threw her arms around his neck, and you can not imagine with what delightful emotion he seemed to receive her almost maternal caresses.

"It was long after sunset," continued Valentine, "before I could again shut myself up in my own room, and return to my dear window. But I had scarcely looked out before I saw a young woman enter the gallery and hasten towards Michel. It was a terrible shock to me. It was both stupid and foolish in me, of course, for I had not the slightest claim upon Michel, but the feeling was not only involuntary but uncontrollable, and, darting away from the window, I threw myself in an armchair, and burying my face in my hands, wept long

and bitterly. Subsequently, I fell into a deep reverie, from which I was aroused a couple of hours afterwards by a prelude upon the piano, and soon two voices that harmonised perfectly began to sing the impassioned duet of Mathilde and Arnold from the opera of 'Guillaume Tell.'"

"It was Michel?"

"Yes, Michel and that woman!"

It is impossible to describe the way in which Valentine uttered the words, "That woman."

After a moment of painful silence she continued:

"The night was clear and still, and the two vibrant, impassioned voices soared heavenward like a pæan of happiness and love. For awhile I listened in spite of myself, but towards the last it made me so utterly wretched, that, not having the courage to go away, I covered my ears with my hands; then, blushing for my absurd weakness, I tried to listen again, but the song had ended. I went back to the window; the air was heavy with the rich perfume of a thousand flowers; there was not a breath of wind; a soft, faint light like that from an alabaster lamp shone through the lowered blinds of the gallery. A profound silence reigned for a few moments, then I heard the gravel in the garden path crunch under the feet of Michel and that woman. They were walking slowly along; his arm was around her waist. I could bear no more, and I hastily closed the window. I passed a frightful night. What new and terrible passions had been aroused during the last two days! Love, desire, jealousy, hatred, remorse,—yes, remorse, for I felt now that an irresistible power was sweeping me on to ruin, and that I should succumb in the struggle. You know the energy and ardour of my character; the same attributes entered into this unfortunate love. I resisted bravely for a time; but when my husband's cruel and brutal conduct exasperated me so deeply, I felt released from all obligations to him, and

blindly abandoned myself to the passion that was devouring me."

"But you have been happy, very happy, have you not, Valentine?"

"At first I experienced bliss unspeakable, though it was marred at times by the recollection of that woman from whom Michel had long been separated. She was a celebrated opera singer, celebrated even in Italy, I believe. I found Michel all I had dreamed, — talented, witty, refined, graceful, deferential, courteous, — all these attributes were united in him, together with a marvellous tenderness and delicacy of feeling, and a perfect disposition. And yet, this liaison had scarcely lasted two months before I became the most miserable of women, while adoring Michel as much as ever."

"But why, my poor Valentine? From what you have just told me, I should think that Michel possessed every attribute necessary to make you happy."

"Yes," sighed Valentine, "but all these attributes are nullified by an incurable fault, by — "

Madame d'Infreville gave a sudden start, then paused abruptly.

"Why do you stop so suddenly, Valentine?" asked Florence, in surprise. "Why this reticence? Go on, I beg of you. Haven't you perfect confidence in me?"

"Have I not just proved it by my confession?"

"Yes, oh, yes; but go on."

"You will understand my reticence, I think," continued Madame d'Infreville, after a moment's hesitation, "when I tell you that all that is kind and noble and tender and commendable in Michel is spoiled by an incurable apathy."

"My chief fault!" exclaimed Madame de Luceval, "so you were afraid to tell me that."

"No, no, Florence; your indolence is charming."

"M. de Luceval doesn't agree with you on that point," responded the young wife, smiling faintly.

"But your indolence has no such disastrous consequences, either so far as you, yourself, or your husband are concerned," replied Valentine. "You enjoy it, and no one really suffers from it. It is very different in Michel's case. He has paid no attention whatever to money matters, and his man of business, encouraged by this negligence, has not only stolen from him in the most shameful manner, but has also embarked in various business enterprises which have been profitable to him but ruinous to Michel, who has been too indolent to verify his accounts; and now, I am by no means sure that he has enough money left to live upon even in the most frugal manner."

"Poor fellow, how sad that is! But is not your influence sufficiently strong to overcome this unfortunate indolence?"

"My influence!" repeated Valentine, smiling bitterly. "What influence can one have over a character like his. Arguments, prayers, entreaties, and warnings do not disturb his serenity in the least. No harsh or unkind word ever falls from Michel's lips, oh, no, but he shrinks from anger and impatience, precisely as he shrinks from fatigue. Always calm, smiling, and affectionate, the most vehement remonstrances, the most despairing supplications, receive no other answer than a smile or a kiss. It is because he has thus completely ignored my advice and entreaties that he finds himself in his present alarming position, alarming at least to me, though not to him; for having led a perfectly indolent life up to the present time, he is not likely to find himself possessed of sufficient courage or energy to rescue himself from his deplorable position when his entire ruin is accomplished."

"You are right, Valentine; the situation is even graver than I thought."

"Yes, for one terrible fear haunts me continually."

"What do you mean?"

"Michel is endowed with too keen powers of dis-

cernment to deceive himself in regard to his future. He knows, too, that when his last louis is spent he has nothing to expect from any one, much less from himself."

"But what do you fear?"

"That he will kill himself," replied Valentine, shuddering.

"Good Heavens! has he hinted at anything of the kind?"

"Oh, no, he has taken good care not to do that. Any such intimation would be sure to lead to a distressing scene on my part, and he hates tears and complaints of any kind. No, he has never admitted that the thought of self-destruction has even occurred to him, but the fact escaped him one day, for he remarked, laughingly, as if it were the simplest thing in the world: 'Happy dead, — eternal idleness is their portion.'"

"But Valentine, this fear is terrible."

"And it never leaves me, even for an instant," replied the unfortunate woman, bursting into tears; "and yet I am obliged to conceal it in his presence, for whenever he sees me sad or preoccupied, he says to me, with that tender, gracious smile of his:

"'Why this sadness, my dear Valentine? Are we not young, and do we not love each other? Let us think only of our happiness. I love you as much as it is possible for me to love any one, so take me as I am, and if I have displeased you in any way, or if I no longer please you, leave me, find some one who suits you better, and let us remain friends only. In my opinion, love should be only joy and felicity, tenderness and repose. It should be like a beautiful lake, clear and calm, reflecting only the pleasant things of life. Why cast a gloom over it by useless anxiety? Let us enjoy our youth in peace, my angel! The person who has known during his whole life ten days of perfect, radiant happiness, should be content to thank God and die. We have had

a hundred and more of such days, my Valentine, and whether we enjoy more of them depends only upon yourself, for I adore you. Am I not too indolent to be inconstant?'

"Yes," added Valentine, with increasing earnestness, "yes, that is the way in which Michel regards love. Those alternations of hope and fear, the vague unrest, the foolish, but no less terrible fits of jealousy that lacerate one's heart, only excite Michel's derision. His indolence — I can not say his indifference, for, after all, he loves me as much as he can love any one, as he says himself — irritates me and makes my blood fairly boil sometimes; but I restrain myself, because, in spite of myself, I adore him just as he is. Nor is this all. Michel never seems to have the slightest suspicion of the remorse and anxiety and fears that assail me every day, for in order that I may be able to spend several hours and sometimes even an entire day with him, I am obliged to tell falsehood after falsehood, to place myself almost at the mercy of my servants, and to devise new pretexts for my frequent absences. And when I return, ah, Florence, when I return, — if you knew what a terrible load I have on my heart when, after a long absence, I place my hand on the knocker, saying to myself all the while, 'What if everything has been discovered!' And when I find myself face to face with my husband, I am even more miserable. To meet his gaze, to try to discover if he has the slightest suspicion of the truth, to tremble inwardly at his most trivial question, to appear calm and indifferent when I am half crazed with fear and anxiety, — all this is torture. And to add to my misery and degradation, I must be assiduous in my attentions to a husband I loathe; I must even stoop to flattery to keep him in good humour, so terribly am I afraid of him, and so eager am I to drive away his suspicions by a bright and cheerful manner. Sometimes, Florence, I must even be gay, do you hear me? Gay, when

I have death in my soul. Ah, Florence, such a life is nothing more or less than a hell upon earth, and yet it is impossible for me to abandon it."

"Oh, Valentine," exclaimed Madame de Luceval, throwing herself in her friend's arms, "I thank you, my dear, dear friend, I thank you! You have saved me!"

CHAPTER VI.

CONNUBIAL INFELICITIES.

MADAME DE LUCEVAL had been listening to her friend with rapidly increasing interest and curiosity for several minutes; then, apparently unable to control her emotion any longer, she had thrown herself in Valentine's arms, exclaiming:

"I thank you, my dear, dear friend, I thank you. You have saved me!"

"Good Heavens! Florence, why do you thank me? Explain, I beg of you," said Madame d'Infreville, gazing at her friend with the utmost astonishment.

"You think I have lost my senses, I suppose," responded Madame de Luceval, smiling faintly. "You little know what a great service you have rendered me."

"I?"

"Yes; a great, an immense service," replied Florence, with a strange mixture of emotion, mirth, and mischievousness. "Would you believe it, when you first told me that you had a lover, I envied you as I envied you at the convent when you left it to be married. And then — why should I try to conceal it from you? — Cousin Michel's tastes and his manner of life seemed so entirely congenial to me, that I said to myself: 'This is just my idea of love. That which annoys my poor Valentine so much would, on the contrary, delight me, and I believe I should love to have a Michel myself.'"

"Florence, what are you saying?"

"Let me finish, please. I am not disposed to conceal anything from you, so I may as well tell you that, as I see stormy times ahead, and as my husband is becoming more and more insupportable, I thought it quite possible that I should require consolation for such an ill-assorted union myself at some future day."

"Oh, Florence, take care," exclaimed Valentine, in evident alarm, "if you knew —"

"If I knew?" retorted Madame de Luceval, interrupting her friend; "if I knew? Why, thanks to you, I do know, and after what you have just told me, nothing on earth could induce me to have a lover. And I verily believe, Heaven forgive me! that I would rather go to the North Pole or to the Caucasus with my husband, than subject myself to all the misery and trials and torments your lover has cost you. A lover! Great Heavens! How wearing it would be! My natural indolence will serve in place of virtue in this instance. Each person is virtuous according to his or her ability, and provided one is virtuous, that is the essential thing, isn't it, Valentine?"

As Florence uttered these words, her expression was at once so serious and so droll, that, in spite of her own troubles, her friend could not help smiling as Madame de Luceval added:

"Ah, my poor Valentine, I do pity you, for such a life must be a hell upon earth, as you say."

"Yes, Florence, so take my advice. Persist in your resolve, and remain faithful to your duties, no matter how onerous they may seem. Profit by my experience, I entreat you," added Valentine, tenderly. "I shall reproach myself all my life if I feel that I have put sinful ideas into your head, or encouraged you to follow my example. So promise me, Florence, my friend, my dear friend, that I shall be spared this sorrow, promise me —"

"You need have no fears on that score, Valentine. Think what it would be for a person who loves her ease

as I do, to attempt to deceive a husband who is rushing in and out of my room a dozen times a day. Why, it makes my brain reel, merely to think of it. No, no; the lesson you have taught me is a good one. It will bear fruit, I assure you. But to return to the subject of your troubles. Your husband's suspicions do not seem to have been aroused as yet."

"You are mistaken about that, I fear, though I am not positive of it."

"Why do you think so?"

"As I told you, my husband spends very little time at home. He leaves the house in the morning, directly after breakfast, and is not only in the habit of dining with his mistress, but of receiving his friends at her house. Afterwards, he takes her to the theatre, returning to her home with her afterwards, where there is pretty heavy playing, people say. At all events, he seldom returns home before three or four o'clock in the morning."

"A nice life for a married man!"

"Either because he has confidence in me, or is indifferent on the subject, he seldom questions me about the way in which I spend my time; but a couple of days ago, not feeling as well as usual, he returned home about three o'clock in the afternoon. I supposed that he would be absent all day, as he told me in the morning that he would not dine at home, so I did not return from Michel's until ten in the evening."

"*Mon Dieu!* How frightened you must have been when you heard of your husband's return. It makes me shudder to think of it!"

"I was so terrified that I at first thought I would not even go up to my own room, but run out of the house and never come back."

"That is what I should have done, I am sure. Still, I don't know —"

"At last I summoned up all my courage, and went

up-stairs. The doctor was there, and M. d'Infreville was suffering so much that he scarcely addressed a word to me. I nursed him all night with hypocritical zeal. When he became easier, he asked me why I had absented myself from home so long, and where I had been. I had been preparing an answer, for I knew the question would come sooner or later, so I told him I had been spending the day with you, as I did quite frequently, since he had left me so much of the time alone. He seemed to believe me, and even pretended to approve, remarking that he knew M. de Luceval by reputation, and was glad to hear of my intimacy with his wife. I thought I was saved, but last night I learned, through my maid, that my husband had questioned her very adroitly, evidently for the purpose of finding out if I was often absent from home. My apprehensions became so grave that, resolved to escape from such an intolerable position at any cost, I went to Michel this morning, and said: 'I am going to confess all to my mother; tell her that my husband has grave suspicions, and that there is nothing left for me but to flee. I shall not return to my husband's house. My mother and I will leave Paris this evening for Brussels. You can join us there if you wish, and the remains of your fortune, and what I can earn by my needle, will suffice for our support. However poor and laborious our life may be, I shall be spared the terrible necessity of lying every day, and of living in a state of continual suspense and terror.'"

"And he consented?"

"He!" exclaimed Valentine, bitterly. "What a fool I was to count upon any such display of firmness on his part! He gazed at me a moment as if stupefied, then assured me that my resolution was absurd in the extreme; that persons resorted to such extreme measures only when they were absolutely compelled to do so; that it would probably be a comparatively easy matter

to allay my husband's suspicions, and he finally suggested my asking you to write that letter."

"Perhaps he was right, after all, in advising you not to flee, as much for your sake as his own, for you are not in such very desperate straits, after all, it seems to me."

"Florence, I feel a presentiment that —"

But Madame d'Infreville never finished the sentence.

The door of the room was suddenly burst open, and M. de Luceval and M. d'Infreville presented themselves to the astonished gaze of Florence and Valentine.

"I am lost!" the latter exclaimed, overwhelmed with terror. Then, covered with shame at the sight of M. de Luceval, she buried her face in her hands.

Florence hastily sprang to her friend's side as if to protect her, and said to M. de Luceval, imperiously:

"What is your business here?"

"I have come to convict you of falsehood, and of a disgraceful complicity with an evil-doer, madame," responded M. de Luceval, threateningly.

"I have discovered that Madame d'Infreville has been absenting herself from her home for entire days for some time past, madame," added the other husband, turning to Florence. "Yesterday I asked Madame d'Infreville where she had spent the day. She told me she had spent it at your house. This letter of yours, madame (he held it up as he spoke), written at the instigation of my wife and with the intention of making me the dupe of an infamous falsehood, happened to fall into M. de Luceval's hands. He has sworn, and I believe him, that he has never once seen Madame d'Infreville here. Under such circumstances, madame, I can hardly believe that you will insist any longer that the contrary is the truth."

"Yes, madame," exclaimed M. de Luceval, "such an admission on your part will not only convict a guilty women, but at the same time serve as a just punishment for your own shameless complicity."

"All I have to say, monsieur, is that Madame d'Infreville is, and always will be, my best friend," responded Florence, resolutely; "and the more unhappy she is, the more she can count upon my devoted affection."

"What, madame!" exclaimed M. de Luceval; "is it possible that you dare —"

"Yes; and I also dare to tell M. d'Infreville that his conduct towards his wife has been both disgraceful and heartless."

"Enough, madame, enough!" cried M. de Luceval, deeply exasperated.

"No, monsieur, it is not enough," retorted Florence. "I still have to remind M. d'Infreville that he is in my house, and that as he knows now what I think of him, he must realise that his presence is an intrusion here."

"You are right, madame; I have heard too much already," retorted M. d'Infreville, with a sardonic smile.

Then taking his wife roughly by the arm, he said:

"Come with me, madame."

The terrified woman, crushed by the burden of her shame, rose mechanically, with her face still buried in her hands.

"My mother, oh, my mother!" she murmured, despairingly.

"I will not desert you, Valentine!" exclaimed Florence, springing towards her friend.

But M. de Luceval, who was evidently very angry, seized his wife around the waist and held her as in a vice, saying as he did so:

"You dare to defy me in this fashion, do you, madame?"

M. d'Infreville took advantage of this opportunity to drag Valentine away, the unfortunate woman offering no resistance, but exclaiming, in a voice broken with sobs, as she disappeared from sight:

"Farewell, Florence, farewell!"

Madame de Luceval, pale with grief and indignation,

remained perfectly motionless for a moment in the grasp of her husband, who did not relax his hold upon her until after Valentine had left the room.

The young woman then said, in a perfectly calm voice:

"M. de Luceval, you have laid violent hands upon me. From this time on, all is over between us."

"Madame!"

"You have had your way, monsieur; now I shall have mine, as I will prove to you."

"Will you have the goodness to make your wishes known, madame," responded M. de Luceval, with a sardonic smile.

"Certainly."

"Go on, madame."

"In the first place, we are to separate, quietly, peaceably, and without the slightest scandal."

"Ah, indeed!"

"It is a thing that is often done, I have heard."

"And at seventeen madame expects to roam about the world as she pleases."

"Roam about the world! Heaven preserve me from that. Travelling is not at all to my taste, as you know, monsieur."

"This is no subject for jesting," exclaimed M. de Luceval, hotly. "Are you really insane enough to imagine that you can live alone and exactly as you please, when your husband has you completely in his power?"

"I have no intention of living alone, monsieur."

"And with whom does madame expect to live, may I ask?"

"Valentine is very unhappy. I intend to live with her and her mother. My fortune is entirely independent of yours, thank Heaven!"

"You intend to live with that woman, — a woman who has had a lover, a woman that her husband will drive out of his house this very night — and he is per-

fectly right! — a woman who deserves the contempt of all decent people. It is with a creature like that you propose to live. The mere announcement of such an intention on your part is quite enough to put you in a madhouse, madame."

"M. de Luceval, the extremely disagreeable events of the day have fatigued me very much, and you will oblige me by not annoying me further. I shall merely add that if any one deserves the contempt of all decent people, it is M. d'Infreville, for it was his shameful treatment of his wife that drove her to ruin. As for Valentine, what she deserves, and will always be sure of from me, is the tenderest compassion."

"Why, this is outrageous! It is enough to put you in a madhouse, I tell you!"

"Understand me once for all, M. de Luceval. No one will shut me up in a madhouse. I shall have my liberty, and you will have yours; and I shall make such use of mine as I think proper."

"We will see about that, madame!"

"Or rather, you will see, monsieur."

CHAPTER VII.

FOUR YEARS LATER.

FOUR years have elapsed since the events we have just related.

It is a winter's day; the cold is intense, the sky gray and lowering. A woman is walking down the Rue de Vaugirard, pausing now and then to glance at the numbers on the houses, as if in search of some particular one.

This woman, who is dressed in mourning, seems to be about twenty-three years of age. She is tall and slender, a decided brunette, with large black eyes, full of expression. Her features are regular, though a little haggard, and her mobile face reveals, in turn, a bitter sadness or a mingled anxiety and impatience. Her quick, somewhat irregular tread also betrays deep agitation.

When this young woman had walked nearly half way down the street, she paused again to study the numbers, and finding herself opposite Number 57, she gave a quick start, and pressed her hand upon her heart, as if to quiet its throbbings; then, after standing a moment perfectly motionless, she directed her steps towards the porte-cochère, then paused again in evident hesitation, but having seen several notices announcing that there were apartments to rent in the house, she resolutely entered the courtyard and walked straight to the porter's lodge.

"You have several apartments to rent, I see, monsieur," she said to the concierge.

"Yes, madame. The first and the third floor, and two separate rooms."

"The first floor would be too dear for me, I fear. The third would probably suit me better. What do you ask for it?"

"Six hundred francs, madame. That is the lowest, for it has just been freshly done up."

"How many rooms are there?"

"A kitchen, a small dining-room, a parlour, a large bedchamber with a big dressing-room, and another small room that would do for a servant. If madame will go up-stairs, she can see for herself."

"I would first like to know who lives in the house. I am a widow and live alone, so you can understand why I ask this question."

"Certainly, madame. The house is very respectable and extremely quiet. The first floor is not occupied, as I told you. A professor in the law school, a highly respectable man, lives on the second floor. He has a wife but no children. The third floor is the one I offered to madame. On the fourth floor there are two small rooms which are occupied by a young man. When I say a young man I don't exactly mean that, however, for M. Michel Renaud must be about thirty."

On hearing the name of Michel Renaud, the young woman, in spite of her self-control, turned first red and then pale, a sad smile flitted across her lips, and her large black eyes gleamed more brightly under their long lashes; but, conquering her emotion, she replied calmly and with a well-feigned air of indifference:

"And the rooms on the third floor are directly under those occupied by this gentleman, I suppose?"

"Yes, madame."

"Is the gentleman married?"

"No, madame."

"I hope you will not be surprised at the questions I put to you, but I have such a horror of a noise over my

head, and of bad company, that I should like to be sure that my future neighbour is not boisterous like so many young men, and that his acquaintances are not such persons as it would be disagreeable for me to meet on the stairways as I go and come."

"M. Michel Renaud have any such company as that! Oh, no, madame; oh, no!" exclaimed the concierge, indignantly.

An expression of hope and joy irradiated the lady's sad face for an instant, and she replied, with a smile:

"I had no intention of maligning the gentleman, and the evident astonishment my question causes you is very reassuring."

"M. Renaud is one of the steadiest of men. Every day of the world — Sundays and holidays as well — he leaves his rooms at half-past three or four o'clock in the morning at the very latest, and never returns until midnight, so he has no visitors."

"They would certainly have to be remarkably early ones, in that case," remarked the young woman, who seemed to take a deep interest in these details. "But does the gentleman leave as early as that every morning?"

"Yes, madame, in winter as well as summer. Nothing keeps him."

"But what business does the gentleman follow that it is necessary for him to leave home by four o'clock in the morning, and remain away until midnight?"

"That is more than I know, madame; but this much is certain, this tenant is not likely to annoy you in any way."

"I believe I could not find a house that would suit me better, judging from what you say. But is it really true that you have no idea what business your tenant follows?"

"How should I know, madame? During the three years that M. Renaud has lived here he has received

only one letter. That was merely addressed to M. Michel Renaud, and no living soul ever comes to see him."

"But he is not dumb, I suppose?"

"He might almost as well be. When he goes out in the morning, I am in bed; when he returns, it is just the same. In the morning, he says, 'The door, please;' in the evening, when he takes his candle, 'Good night, M. Landré' (that is my name). That is the extent of our conversation."

"But doesn't he keep a servant?"

"No, madame, he does all his own housework. That is to say, he makes his own bed, blacks his shoes, brushes his clothes, and sweeps his room."

"He!" exclaimed the young woman, in accents of the most profound astonishment.

Then bethinking herself, she added:

"It seems so strange that a gentleman should do all those things for himself."

"Oh, I don't know," replied the concierge, who seemed surprised at the lady's evident astonishment; "everybody hasn't an income of fifty thousand francs a year, and when one hasn't the money to pay a servant, one must serve oneself."

"That is very true, monsieur."

"And now would madame like to see the third floor?"

"Yes, for, after all, I think it would be difficult for me to find a house that would suit me better."

CHAPTER VIII.

ANOTHER SEARCH.

As the prospective tenant began her ascent, close upon the heels of the concierge, another rather peculiar scene was occurring in the adjoining house, the lower floor of which was used as a café.

This establishment, which was not very extensively patronised at any time, could now boast of but a single guest. He was seated at a table, on which stood a carafe of water, a bowl of sugar, and a glass of absinthe.

This patron, who had entered the café only a few minutes before, was a slender, nervous, sunburnt man about thirty years of age. He had strongly marked features, and was exceedingly quick in his movements. He picked up several newspapers in swift succession, and pretended to glance over them as he smoked his cigar, but his mind was evidently not upon what he was reading, that is, if he was reading at all, and at last, flinging the journal violently down upon the table, he called the waiter in a curt, peremptory tone.

The waiter, a gray-haired man, hastened to respond to the summons.

"Bring me a glass of absinthe, waiter," said the man with the cigar.

"But your glass is still full, monsieur."

"True."

The man drained the glass, and the waiter refilled it.

"Would you like to make a hundred sous?" asked the man with the cigar.

And seeing the waiter gaze at him in astonishment, he repeated, in an even more brusque fashion:

"I ask you if you want to make a hundred sous?"

"But, monsieur —"

"Do you or do you not? Answer me."

"I should like to very much, but what am I to do, monsieur?"

"Answer the questions I am going to put to you. Have you been here long?"

"Ever since the café opened, about ten years ago."

"Do you live here in the house?"

"Yes, monsieur. I have a room in the fifth story."

"Do you know all the inmates of the house?"

"Either by name, or by sight, yes, monsieur, but that is all. I am the only waiter here, and I have no time to visit."

After a moment of painful hesitation, during which the stranger's features betrayed the most poignant anxiety, he said to the waiter, in a slightly husky voice:

"Who lives on the fourth floor?"

"A lady, monsieur."

"Nobody else?"

"No, monsieur."

"Is she a widow?"

"I don't know, monsieur. She calls herself Madame Luceval, that is all I can tell you."

"But you must understand that if I am to give you a hundred sous, I expect you to tell me something."

"One can tell only what one knows, monsieur."

"Of course, that is understood. But now answer me frankly. What do the people in the house think of this lady — this Madame — What did you call her?"

"Madame Luceval, monsieur. A person would have to be very spiteful to gossip about her, for nobody ever sees her."

"What?"

"She always goes out at four o'clock in the morning, summer and winter, and though I never get to bed before midnight, I always hear her come in after I do."

"Impossible!" exclaimed the man with the cigar, manifesting quite as much astonishment as the lady in mourning had done on hearing of M. Renaud's early hours. "The lady goes out at four o'clock every morning, you say?"

"Yes, monsieur. I hear her close her door."

"It passes my comprehension," muttered the man with the cigar. Then, after a moment's reflection, he added:

"What does this lady do to take her out so early?"

"I have no idea, monsieur."

"But what do the people in the house think of it?"

"Nothing, monsieur."

"Nothing! Do you mean that they see nothing remarkable about a lady going out at four o'clock in the morning?"

"When Madame Luceval first came here, about four years ago, her manner of living did seem rather peculiar, but people soon ceased to trouble themselves about it; for, as I told you just now, nobody ever sees her, so people forget all about her, though she is wonderfully pretty."

"If she is so pretty, she must have a lover, of course," said the stranger, with a sarcastic smile, but as if the words, somehow, burned his tongue.

"I have heard persons say that this lady never has a visitor, monsieur."

"But when she returns home so late at night, she does not return alone, I fancy."

"I cannot say whether any one accompanies her to the house or not, but I do know that no man ever crosses her threshold."

"She is really a paragon of virtue, then?"

"She certainly seems to be, and I am sure that everybody in the house will tell you the same thing that I do."

"Do you know what her resources are? What she lives on, in short?"

"I haven't the slightest idea, though it is not at all likely that she lives on her income, monsieur. Rich people don't get up at that hour, especially on a morning like this, when the cold cuts you like a knife, and the clock in the Luxembourg was striking half-past three when I heard the lady leave her room this morning."

"It is strange, passing strange! It seems to me I must be dreaming," muttered the gentleman. Then —

"Is that all you know?" he asked aloud.

"That is all, monsieur. But I can vouch for it that nobody in the house knows any more."

The man with the cigar remained silent and thoughtful for a few minutes, during which he sipped his second glass of absinthe abstractedly, then, throwing a foreign gold coin on the table, he said:

"Take out the amount of my bill, and keep one hundred sous for yourself. Your money was very easily earned, it strikes me."

"I did not ask you for the money, monsieur, and if you —"

"I mean what I say. Pay yourself, and don't talk any more about it."

After he had received the change due him the stranger left the café. Almost at the same instant, the lady dressed in mourning came out of the adjoining house, and started down the street in the opposite direction from that which the gentleman had taken.

As they passed each other, their eyes met. The man paused for an instant, as if the sight of this woman aroused some vague recollection, then, thinking his memory must have deceived him, he walked on up the street.

CHAPTER IX.

A STRANGE MEETING.

But before the man with the cigar had gone a dozen yards, his first impression reasserted itself so vividly that he turned, almost involuntarily, to take another look at the lady in mourning.

She, too, turned almost simultaneously, but seeing that the man she had noticed had done the same thing, she hastily turned her head and walked on at a rather more rapid pace. Nevertheless, as she crossed the street to enter the garden of the Luxembourg, she could not resist the temptation to cast another quick glance behind her, and, as she did so, she saw that the man with the cigar was still standing in the same place watching her. Angry at having been caught in the act of thus violating the rules of good breeding a second time, she hastily lowered her black veil, and, quickening her pace still more, entered the garden. The man with the cigar, after a moment's hesitation, hurriedly retraced his steps, and, on reaching the entrance to the garden, saw the young woman some distance ahead of him in the broad path leading to the Observatory.

One of those peculiar instincts which often apprise us of things that we cannot see made the young woman feel almost certain that she was followed. She hesitated a long time before she could make up her mind to again satisfy herself of the fact, however; but she was about to yield to the temptation when she heard hurried footsteps behind her, then some one passed her.

It was the man with the cigar. He walked on until he was about twenty yards ahead of her, then turned, resolutely approached the young woman, and raising his hat, said, with perfect politeness:

"Madame, I ask a thousand pardons for thus accosting you."

"I have not the honour of knowing you, monsieur."

"Permit me to ask a single question, madame?"

"Really, monsieur —"

"I should not be under the necessity of asking you this question if I could be fortunate enough to see your veil lifted."

"Monsieur —"

"Pray do not think that I am actuated by any impertinent curiosity, madame. I am incapable of such rudeness; but as I passed you on the Rue de Vaugirard, a few minutes ago, it seemed to me that I had met you before, and under very peculiar circumstances."

"And I must confess that I, too, thought —"

"You had met me before?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"In Chili, was it not?"

"About eight months ago?"

"A few miles from Valparaiso?"

"About nightfall?"

"On the borders of a lake. A party of bandits had attacked your carriage, madame."

"The approach of a party of travellers mounted upon mules, whose bells could be heard a long distance off, frightened the scoundrels away. This party which had just left Valparaiso met us —"

"Precisely as I met you on the Rue de Vaugirard, a few minutes ago, madame," said the man, smiling; "and to ensure your safety, one of the gentlemen of the party, with three of his escort, decided to accompany your carriage as far as the nearest village."

"And this traveller was you, monsieur. I remember

you perfectly now, though I had the pleasure of seeing you only for a few moments, and in the dusk, as night comes on so quickly in Chili."

"And it was very dark by the time we reached the village of — of Balaméda, if my memory does not play me false, madame."

"I do not remember the name of the village, monsieur, but what I do, and what I always shall remember, is your extreme kindness; for after you had escorted us to the village, you had to make great haste to overtake your party, which was travelling northward, it seems to me."

"Yes, madame."

"And you overtook your friends without any unpleasant accident, I trust? We felt very uneasy on that score, the roads along those precipices are so dangerous; besides, those same bandits might still be lurking behind the rocks."

"My return was made in the most peaceful manner. My mule only had to quicken his pace a little, that is all."

"You must admit, monsieur, that it is very singular that an acquaintance made in the wilds of Chili should be renewed in the garden of the Luxembourg."

"It is, indeed, madame. But I see that it is beginning to snow. Will you permit me to offer you my arm and a shelter under my umbrella, until we can reach the nearest cab-stand?"

"I really fear that I am trespassing too much on your kindness," replied the lady, accepting the proffered courtesy, nevertheless.

Arm in arm, they accordingly directed their steps towards the cab-stand near the Odéon. They found but one vehicle there. The young woman entered it, but her companion, from delicacy, seemed in doubt as to whether he should or should not follow her.

"What are you waiting for, monsieur?" the lady asked, affably. "There are no other carriages here; will you not make use of this one?"

"I scarcely dared to ask such a favour," replied the gentleman, eagerly availing himself of the permission thus accorded. Then—

"What address shall I give the coachman?" he added.

"Ask him to take me where the Rue de Rivoli intersects the Place de la Concorde," replied the lady, with some slight embarrassment. "I will wait under the arcade there until it stops snowing, as I have some business to attend to in that locality."

This order given, the coachman turned his horses' heads towards the right bank of the Seine.

"Do you know, I think our meeting more and more marvellous," remarked the young woman.

"While I admit that the meeting is singular, it seems to me even more agreeable than singular."

"No compliments, if you please, monsieur. They do very well for people who have nothing else to say to each other; and I confess that if you are inclined to gratify my curiosity, you will not have answered half the questions I want to put to you, when the time comes for us to separate."

"You should not tell me that; I shall be sure to become very diffuse in my style of conversation, in the hope that your curiosity—"

"Will inspire me with the desire to meet you a second time, if you do not tell me all to-day. Is that what you mean?"

"Yes, madame."

The lady smiled faintly, then she continued:

"But in order that we may take things in their natural course, tell me first what you were going to do in the northern part of Chili. I was returning from there myself, when I met you, eight months ago, and, as I know it is a region little frequented by travellers, you will understand and excuse a question which might otherwise sound too inquisitive, perhaps."

"Before answering this question, madame, it is absolutely necessary that I should give you some insight into my character; otherwise, you might mistake me for a madman."

"And why, monsieur?"

"Because I am possessed — devoured, perhaps, would be a better word — by such a continual desire to be moving, that for several years past, especially, I have not been able to remain a month in the same place. In short, I have a passion, perhaps I ought rather to say a positive mania, for travel."

"Strange to say, I, too, experience the same unconquerable restlessness, the same longing to be continually on the go, the same intense aversion to repose, and, like you, I, myself, have found a most welcome diversion in travel, for several years past," the young woman responded, smothering a sigh.

"So you, too, madame, have a horror of the dull, lethargic, monotonous life which reminds one of that of an oyster on his bank, or of a snail in his shell?"

"To me torpor and immobility are death itself, yes, worse than death, for, unfortunately, one must be conscious of this apathy of mind and body."

"And yet, there are persons — one can scarcely call them living beings — who would gladly remain for months, and even years, in the same place, lost in a sort of dreamy ecstasy, and enjoying what they style the charm of *dolce far niente*."

"Yes, monsieur, yes; there are such people, as I know only too well."

"So you have had a like experience, madame? So you, too, have seen how hopelessly intractable such persons are, — how they will eventually triumph over the strongest wills?"

And the two gazed at each other in a sort of bewilderment, so astonished were they by this strange similarity in their experiences.

CHAPTER X.

CONTRADICTIONS.

THE young woman was the first to break the silence.

"Let us drop the subject, monsieur," she said, sighing heavily. "It arouses too many painful recollections."

"Yes, let us drop it, madame, for I, too, am tortured by many painful recollections from which I am ever striving to escape, for it is cowardly and degrading to permit one's mind to dwell continually upon persons one hates and despises. Ah, madame, I sincerely hope you may never know that mixture of regret, aversion, and love, which renders one's life for ever miserable."

The young woman listened to her companion with profound astonishment, for, when he spoke of himself, it seemed as if he must also be speaking of her, so identical had been their experience; but the reserve which she must necessarily display in her intercourse with a comparative stranger, prevented any such admission on her part; so, quite as much to conceal her real feelings as to gratify her growing curiosity, she remarked:

"You speak of mingled aversion and love, monsieur. How can one both love and hate the same person or thing? Is such a strange contradiction possible?"

"Ah, madame, is not the human heart the greatest of mysteries, — the strangest of enigmas? Ever since the world began, the inexplicable attraction which opposites have for each other has been admitted. How often we see a person who is weak admire one who is strong, and one who is violent and impetuous seek out one who is

gentle and timid! What is the cause of this? Is it the desire for a contrast? Or, is it the charm of overcoming a certain difficulty? Nobody knows. The fact remains that persons whose characters are diametrically opposed to our own exercise an inexplicable attraction over us, — inexplicable, yes; for we curse them, we pity them, we despise them, and we hate them; and yet, we can not do without them; or, if they escape us, we regret them as much as we hate them, and forthwith begin to dream of the impossible, that is to say, of acquiring sufficient influence over them to transform them, to imbue them with our own ideas and tastes. Dreams, idle dreams these are, of course, which only serve to make us forget the sad reality for a brief time."

"I, too, have often heard of these strange contradictions. They are the more incomprehensible to me, as the only chance of happiness seems to me to consist in perfect congeniality of temperament."

The young woman paused suddenly, and blushed, deeply regretting words which might be construed as an advance made to a comparative stranger (though this had really been furthest from her thoughts), especially after both she and he had commented on the remarkable similarity in their tastes. But this fear on her part was entirely unnecessary, as the turn the conversation had taken seemed to have plunged her companion into a profound reverie.

A few minutes afterwards, the carriage stopped at the corner of the Rue de Rivoli, and the driver got down from the box to open the door.

"What! are we here already?" exclaimed the stranger, arousing himself; then, motioning the coachman to close the door again, he said:

"I sincerely hope you will pardon me for having made such poor use of the last few minutes of the interview you have been kind enough to grant me, but I yielded almost unconsciously to the influence of certain memories.

You will not refuse, I trust, to indemnify me by permitting me to see you again, and to have the honour of calling on you at your own home."

"What you ask, monsieur, is impossible for quite a number of reasons."

"Do not refuse my request, I beg of you. There seem to be so many points of similarity in our lot; besides, there are still many things I would like to tell you in relation to my South American journey, and the cause of it. Our meeting, too, has been so extraordinary, that I feel sure all these reasons will decide you to grant the favour I ask, though I should not dare to insist in the name of the very slight service which I was so fortunate as to be able to render you, and which you are extremely kind to even remember."

"I am not ungrateful, believe me, monsieur. I admit, too, that it would give me great pleasure to see you again, and yet, I shall probably be obliged to renounce this hope."

"Ah, madame —"

"Well, I will propose this, monsieur. To-day is Monday —"

"Yes, madame."

"Be here under the arcade at noon on Thursday."

"I will, madame, I will."

"If I am not here at the end of an hour, — which is more than probable, — we shall never see each other again, monsieur."

"But why do you say that, madame?"

"It is impossible for me to explain now, monsieur; but, whatever happens, you must rest assured that I have been very glad of an opportunity to thank you for a service I shall always remember with gratitude."

"What, madame, I may never see you again, yet I am leaving you without even knowing your name."

"If we are never to meet again, monsieur, what is the use of knowing my name? If, on the contrary, we do

meet here again on Thursday I will tell you who I am, and, if you still desire it, we will continue the acquaintance begun in a different hemisphere, and renewed by an unexpected meeting."

"I thank you for this hope, madame, uncertain though it be. I will not insist further, so farewell, — until Thursday, madame."

"Until Thursday, monsieur."

And the two separated.

CHAPTER XI.

NEAR NEIGHBOURS.

THE morning after this interview between these two travellers who had met in Chili, the following scene occurred in the fourth story of house Number 57, on the Rue de Vaugirard.

It was quarter of four, but a remarkably handsome young man was already writing by the light of a shaded lamp.

Need we say that this young man was M. Michel Renaud, the model tenant who left home regularly every morning at four o'clock and never returned before midnight.

He was engaged in copying into one of those big leather-bound books, used in business houses, a long row of figures and entries from some carelessly kept day-books, and more than once this uninteresting, monotonous work seemed to benumb both brain and hands, but he bravely overcame the inclination to sleep, wrapped the blanket in which he had enveloped his legs and feet more closely around him, blew on his fingers to warm them, for there was not a spark of fire in the little room, and then resumed his work.

In spite of this uncongenial employment, pursued amid such uncomfortable surroundings, Michel's face was serene, even happy; but when the clock in a neighbouring church rang out the third quarter of an hour, it was with the smiling, affectionate expression of a person who

is about to bid a dear friend good morning that the young man rose from the table and, hastening towards the fireplace, rapped twice with the handle of his pocket-knife upon the party wall that separated the house in which he lived from the adjoining house.

Two similar raps answered him almost instantly, and Michel smiled with a satisfied air, as if the most agreeable remark conceivable had been addressed to him. He was preparing to reply, doubtless, in fact he had already lifted the handle of his knife for that purpose, when a faint, almost mysterious knock, followed by two louder ones, reached his ear.

Michel's face flushed, and his eyes brightened. One would have supposed that he had received a favour as precious as it was unexpected, and it was with an expression of intense gratitude that he replied with a series of quick, irregular raps, as hurried and feverish as the violent throbbings of his own heart.

This rapping would doubtless have been prolonged several seconds with ever increasing ardour, if it had not been suddenly checked by a single incisive knock which resounded from the other side of the wall like an imperative command. Michel obeyed this order respectfully, and immediately suspended his rather too lively manifestation of delight.

A moment afterwards, four slow, distinct knocks, prolonged like the striking of a clock, coming from the other side of the wall, put an end to this singular conversation quite worthy of a lodge of freemasons.

"She is right," murmured Michel. "It is almost four o'clock."

And he immediately set to work to arrange his books and put his room in order before leaving it for the day.

While he is engaged in these preparations for departure we will conduct the reader up to the fourth floor of the adjoining house, — Number 59, — and into the apartment of Madame de Luceval, separated, as we

have before remarked, from that of Michel Renaud by a party wall.

That young lady is now about twenty-one years of age, and as charming as ever, though not quite as stout. She, too, like her neighbour, was busily engaged in her preparations for departure.

A lamp, like that used by engravers who work at night, stood on a large table strewn with several partially coloured lithographs, boxes of water-colour paints, pieces of embroidery and tapestry work, and a number of those music-books into which orchestral scores are copied. Several of these last were already filled. The plainly furnished room was exquisitely neat, and Florence's hat and cloak were already laid out on the carefully made bed.

More than once, as she deftly arranged her water-colours, music scores, and needlework in their respective boxes, the young woman blew upon her dainty rosy fingers, the cold in this room being quite as intense as in her neighbour's, for in this room, too, there was no fire.

There was a great difference between this life and the life she had led in her husband's luxurious home, where everything had combined to encourage the indolence in which she so delighted; and yet, she looked far more happy than when, half reclining in her comfortable arm-chair, with her feet resting upon a big velvet cushion, she idly watched the sunbeams rioting in her beautiful garden, and dreamily listened to the soft murmur of the fountain. In short, this once indolent creature, who thought a drive in a luxurious carriage entirely too fatiguing, did not seem to regret her vanished splendour in the least, but blithely hummed a merry tune as she drew on her overshoes and took a small umbrella from the cupboard, ready to brave snow, wind, and cold without a murmur.

These preparations for departure concluded, Florence cast a hasty glance in the mirror, passed her hand over

the waves of golden hair, — hair which was as smooth and glossy, in spite of her early toilet, as if a maid had spent an hour over the young woman's coiffure; then, throwing her body slightly backward, she stretched out her arms and allowed her graceful head to sink languidly upon her left shoulder, giving at the same time a little yawn that said as plainly as any words:

"Ah, how pleasant it would be to stay in a nice, comfortable bed, instead of going out in the cold at four o'clock in the morning!"

But the next moment, as if reproaching herself for her weakness, Florence hastily donned her hat and cloak, picked up her umbrella, lighted her candle, extinguished the lamp, and went swiftly but lightly down-stairs.

The clock in the Luxembourg was just striking four.

"Dear me! it is four o'clock already," she murmured, as she reached the foot of the last flight of stairs; then, in her clear, young voice, she called out:

"Pull the rope, please."

And in another moment the door of the house had closed behind her, and she was in the street.

It was late in the month of December, and the night was very dark. A cold wind was whistling through the deserted street, which was but dimly lighted by an occasional street lamp.

As soon as she was out of the house, she gave a slight cough, apparently as a sort of a signal.

A louder hum! hum! answered it.

But it was so dark that Florence could scarcely see Michel, who had come out a few seconds before, and stationed himself on the other side of the street, for it was he who had thus responded to his fair neighbour's signal.

Then the two, without addressing so much as a word to each other, started down the street, — he on the left side, she on the right.

About half an hour before Michael Renaud left his dwelling, a cab stopped a short distance from Number 57. A lady, enveloped in a long pelisse, was in this cab. She had said to the coachman:

"When you see a gentleman come out of that house, you are to follow him until I tell you to stop."

The coachman, thanks to the light of his carriage lamps, saw Michel leave the house, and at once started his horse down the middle of the street at a walk. The occupant of the cab kept her eyes riveted on Michel, and thus, engrossed in the movements on the left side of the street, did not even see Madame de Luceval, who was on the opposite pavement.

But Madame de Luceval had scarcely closed the door of her house behind her when a man wrapped in a long cloak came rushing down the street, as if afraid of being too late for something.

This man had consequently failed to hear the signal exchanged between Florence and Michel, nor could he even see the latter, concealed as he was by the cab that was moving slowly down the street.

So the man in the cloak began to follow Madame de Luceval, while the lady in the cab did not once take her eyes off Michel.

CHAPTER XII.

A VAIN PURSUIT.

MICHEL and Florence, engrossed in each other, though separated by the width of the street, paid no attention to the cab which was moving slowly along in the same direction, it being a very common occurrence to see such vehicles returning to the stable at that time in the morning.

As the two neighbours reached the corner of the Rue de Tournon, they met a crowd of huckster wagons on their way to the market, and the lady in the cab finding her progress thus impeded, and fearing she would lose sight of the person she was following, ordered the driver to open the door, paid him, alighted, and hastened on after Michel. She was half way down the Rue de Tournon, when she noticed, for the first time, a man wrapped in a cloak, walking only a short distance ahead of her. At first this discovery did not disturb her, but subsequently, perceiving by the light of a street lamp that a woman was walking a few yards in advance of this man, and that this woman was pursuing the same route as Michel Renaud, she began to think this very singular, and afterwards her attention was naturally divided between Michel, Madame de Luceval, and the man who was a short distance behind that lady.

Michel and Florence, whose heads were well muffled up as a protection from the cold, had, as yet, no suspicion that they were being followed, and walked briskly on towards the little square at the end of the Rue

Dauphine. The man in the cloak, who had been too much absorbed hitherto to take much notice of what was going on around him, now observed for the first time that a woman was following a man on the side of the street opposite to that on which he was following Florence, and great was his surprise when, as this woman passed the lighted windows of a liquor shop, he fancied he recognised in her the same lady whom he had escorted to the corner of the Rue de Rivoli the previous afternoon, and whom he had met months before in one of the mountain passes of Chili.

The woman's tall stature and lithe tread, as well as her mourning garb, corroborated these suspicions, and the fact of this double pursuit, after their interview of the day before, was too extraordinary for the man not to desire to solve this mystery at once, so, without losing sight of Florence, he hastily crossed the street, and, approaching the mysterious lady, said:

"One word, madame, if you please —"

"You, monsieur!" the lady exclaimed, "is it you?"

Both stood for an instant as if petrified.

The man was the first to recover himself.

"Madame, after what has occurred, and for our mutual benefit, we must have a full explanation at once," he exclaimed, hastily.

"I think so, too, monsieur."

"Very well, then, madame. I —"

"Take care! Look out for that wagon!" exclaimed the lady, pointing to a big milk wagon that was tearing down the street, almost grazing the gutter in which the man in the cloak had stopped.

He sprang aside quickly, but, in the meantime, Florence and Michel had reached the square, and disappeared from sight, thanks to the progress they had made during this short colloquy between their pursuers.

The woman, noting Michel's disappearance, exclaimed, in accents of intense dismay:

"I don't see him any longer! I have lost him!"

These words reminded her companion of the pursuit he, too, had momentarily forgotten, and he, too, turned quickly, but could see nothing of Florence.

"Let us hasten on to the square, madame; perhaps we can overtake them. Here, take my arm."

"No, no, monsieur, let us run, let us run," cried the young woman.

So both ran towards the square at the top of their speed, but when they reached it they did not see a living soul in either of the four or five narrow streets that diverged from it. Realising how utterly useless it would be to extend their search further, the two stood for a moment in silence, resting after their run, and again thinking, perhaps, of the singular *rapprochement* between their destinies.

"Really, madame, it makes me wonder whether I am awake or dreaming," exclaimed the man in the cloak at last.

"What you say is perfectly true, monsieur. I really cannot believe what I see with my own eyes," replied the lady.

"I feel, madame, that what has happened to us to-day is so inexplicable that our mutual reserve should be maintained no longer."

"I agree with you, perfectly, monsieur. Will you give me your arm? I am nearly frozen, and what with the surprise and excitement, I am feeling far from well, but my indisposition will pass off if I walk a little way, I think."

"Which way shall we go, madame?"

"It doesn't matter in the least, — towards the Pont Neuf, perhaps."

As they walked slowly on, the following conversation took place:

"I feel it obligatory upon me to first tell you my name, monsieur," remarked the lady. "It is not a

matter of much consequence, perhaps, but you ought to know who I am. I am a widow, and my name is Valentine d'Infreville."

"Good God!" exclaimed the man in the cloak, stopping short in his astonishment. "You Madame d'Infreville?"

"Why do you evince such astonishment, monsieur? My name is not unknown to you."

"After all," remarked the man, recovering from the amazement this announcement had caused, "it is not surprising that I did not recognise you either here or in Chili, madame, for the first time I saw you, four years ago, I could not distinguish your features; besides, the indignation I felt —"

"What do you mean, monsieur? Do you mean that you had seen me before our meeting in Chili?"

"Yes, madame."

"And where?"

"I scarcely dare to remind you."

"In whose house did you meet me, tell me, monsieur?"

"In my wife's house."

"Your wife's?"

"In the house of Madame de Luceval."

"What! You are —?"

"M. de Luceval."

Valentine d'Infreville stood as if petrified in her turn by this allusion which awakened so many painful memories; but, after a moment, she said, in tones of profound sadness:

"You speak the truth, monsieur. The first and only time we met at Madame de Luceval's it must have been as impossible for you to distinguish my features as it was for me to distinguish yours. Overcome with shame, I concealed my face, and, even now," she added, turning away her head as if to escape M. de Luceval's gaze, "I thank Heaven that it is dark."

"Believe me, madame, it is with deep regret that I remind you of a scene that was so distressing to you, and to myself as well, for, influenced by M. d'Infreville, I —"

But Valentine, interrupting him, inquired, with mingled curiosity, uneasiness, and tender interest:

"And Florence; where is she?"

"It was Florence that I was following just now."

"What! That woman was —"

"Madame de Luceval; yes."

"But why were you following her?"

"You are not aware, then —"

"Speak, monsieur, speak!"

"That my wife and I have separated," replied M. de Luceval, smothering a sigh.

"But where does Florence live?"

"On the Rue de Vaugirard."

"Great Heavens! How strange!" exclaimed Valentine, starting violently.

"What is the matter, madame?"

"Florence lives in the Rue de Vaugirard, you say. At what number?"

"Number 59."

"And Michel lives at Number 57!" exclaimed Valentine.

"Michel!" exclaimed M. de Luceval, in his turn. "Michel Renaud?"

"Yes, your cousin. He has a room on the fourth floor, at Number 57. I had just satisfied myself of that fact yesterday when I met you."

"And my wife lives on the same floor in the adjoining house," said M. de Luceval.

Then, feeling Valentine's arm tremble convulsively, he added:

"What is the matter, madame? Are you faint?"

"Pardon me, monsieur, — but it — it is the cold, I think, — that — that makes me feel so strangely. I can

scarcely stand, — and my head seems to be going around and around."

"Have a little courage, madame. Let us try to reach that shop there at the corner of the quay."

"I'll try, monsieur," replied Valentine, faintly.

She did manage to drag herself to the store designated, which proved to be a grocery store. There was a woman behind the counter, the wife of the proprietor, and she took Madame d'Infreville into a room back of the store, and gave her every possible attention.

An hour afterwards, when daylight had come, a carriage was sent for, and M. de Luceval took Madame d'Infreville to her home.

CHAPTER XIII.

TRAVEL UNDER DIFFICULTIES.

THE events of the morning had upset Madame d'Infreville so completely, and she felt so incapable of coherent thought, that she asked M. de Luceval to return that evening at eight o'clock, so she could have a full explanation with him; so at eight o'clock M. de Luceval sent up his card to Valentine, who had taken a suite of furnished rooms on the Chaussée d'Antin.

"How are you feeling this evening, madame?" he inquired, with great interest, when he was admitted into that lady's presence.

"Better, much better, monsieur, and I sincerely trust you will pardon my absurd weakness this morning."

"Was it not very natural, madame, after so many startling revelations and occurrences?"

"Possibly, monsieur; at all events, I felt so bewildered that I was obliged to ask you to return this evening, that we might have the explanation which is now indispensable."

"I am at your service, madame."

"Will you first permit me to ask you a few questions. I will afterwards answer yours. You told me that you and Florence were divorced, did you not? I was not aware of it before."

"That is not strange, for since that unfortunate evening when I met you in my house, neither my wife nor I have heard anything in relation to you."

"I will tell you why, monsieur."

"I must first explain that, after the terrible scene in which you and M. d'Infreville, and my wife and I, took part, I very naturally felt deeply incensed with you. After your departure, Florence and I had a violent quarrel. She declared that she would not live with me any longer, and that she intended to make her home with you and your mother, that is, of course, if you and M. d'Infreville separated."

"Did Florence really intend to do that?"

"Yes, madame, for she always seemed to feel the tenderest affection for you. As you may suppose, I told her that such an idea was madness; but she, nevertheless, declared that she should leave me, whether or no. I shrugged my shoulders, but the separation took place, nevertheless."

"Such firmness of will on Florence's part surprises me very much; it accords so little with her habitual indolence."

"Ah, madame, how little you know her! How little I knew her myself! You have no idea how the inertia of such a character makes itself felt. Prior to the scene in which you were a participant, my wife and I had had a slight disagreement. As I have told you, I have a passion for travel. It was the desire of my life to make Florence share this fondness, for I was very much in love with her, and to explore foreign lands in company with a beloved wife was my ideal of happiness. But Florence, with her incurable indolence, would not listen to the idea for a moment. I was wrong, undoubtedly; I realise it now that it is too late. I treated her too much as if she were a child and I the master; and though I loved her to idolatry, I thought her best interests and my dignity demanded that I should be imperious and severe; besides, — shall I confess it? — nervous, quick-tempered, and energetic as I am, her mocking indifference drove me almost crazy. The day after I met you in her room, she went to your house, but

your servants told her that you had left in the night with your mother and M. d'Infreville. As time passed, and she could discover no clue to your whereabouts, her chagrin and grief became intense. I pitied her so much that for some time I said nothing about a journey I had contemplated for many months, but finally, resolved to overcome my wife's opposition on this subject, I announced my intention of visiting Switzerland. I anticipated a lively resistance on her part, but I was wrong."

"She consented?"

"'You insist upon my travelling,' she said to me. 'So be it. You have a right to do so, you claim. Very well, try it,' she added, with a most nonchalant air, 'but I warn you that you will bring me back to Paris within a week.'"

"And within a week, monsieur — ?"

"I had brought her back to Paris."

"But how did she manage to compel you to do so?"

"In the simplest way in the world," said M. de Luceval, bitterly. "We started. At our first stopping-place — I forgot to tell you that we did not start until nine in the morning, so she would not be obliged to rise too early —"

"Well?"

"She remained in bed forty-eight hours on the pretext that she was overcome with fatigue, remarking to me with an insolent calmness that exasperated me beyond measure, 'The law gives you the right to compel me to accompany you, but the law does not limit the hours I am to remain in bed.' What could one say in reply to this? Besides, how was one to while away forty-eight hours in a dingy inn? Picture, if you can, madame, my wrath and impatience all that time, unable to extort another word from my wife. Nevertheless, I would not yield. 'I can stand it as long as she can,' I said to myself; 'she loves her comfort, and two or three such

sojourns in dingy post-stations will cure her of her obstinacy.' "

"And were these expectations on your part realised?"

"I will tell you, madame. At the end of these two days, we set out again, and about three o'clock in the afternoon we stopped in a miserable little village for fresh horses. The road had been rather dusty, and Florence got out of the carriage and ordered her maid to come and brush the dust out of her hair. My wife was conducted to a dingy room. The bed was so untidy and uninviting that she would not lie down on it, so she made them bring in an old armchair. She established herself in that, declaring that, as she was even more fatigued this time, she would not stir out of that room for four days. I thought she was jesting, but such, alas! was not the case."

"What, monsieur, do you really mean that for four days —"

"I did not lose courage until the end of the third day. Then I could stand it no longer! Three days, madame, three whole days in that dingy hole, trying in vain to devise some means of overcoming my wife's resistance. To resort to force, and pick her up and put her in the carriage was out of the question. What a scandal it would create! Besides, the same thing would undoubtedly have to be done over again at the next post-station. Threats and entreaties proved equally futile! And we started back to Paris exactly six days after we left it. Bad news awaited us. My wife's entire fortune had been left in the hands of her guardian, a well-known banker. He had failed and fled the country. I experienced a feeling of secret joy. Deprived of her fortune, my wife, finding herself entirely dependent upon me, would perhaps be more tractable."

"I know Florence, monsieur, and unless I am very much deceived, you were disappointed in your expectations."

"That is only too true, madame. On hearing of her loss of fortune, Florence, far from manifesting any regret, seemed much pleased. Her first words were:

"'I hope you will no longer refuse to consent to a separation now.'

"'Less than ever,' I replied; 'for I pity you, and cannot bear the thought of your being exposed to want.'

"'Before I lost my property,' she replied, 'I was rather loath to leave you, for I have given up all hope of finding Valentine. That being the case, I was fairly content to live on quietly after my own fashion; but now, every hour spent in this house is torture to me, and I will endure it no longer, so consent to give me back my freedom, and accept your own.'

"'But how will you live, — you who have all your life been accustomed to ease and luxury?'

"'I asked for ten thousand francs of my dowry when I married,' she answered. 'Part of this sum is still in my possession, and it will suffice.'

"'But this small amount spent, what will you live on?'

"'That is a matter which does not concern you in the least,' she retorted.

"'On the contrary, it does concern me to such an extent that I shall save you in spite of yourself, for whatever you may do, I will never consent to a separation.'

"'Listen, monsieur,' she said, earnestly; 'your intentions are most generous, and I thank you for them. You have many very excellent traits. You are the most honourable man that ever lived, but our characters, dispositions, and tastes are, and always will be, so entirely incompatible that life would soon become intolerable to both of us. Besides, this is a matter for me to decide, for, having lost my fortune, I should be a burden to you, pecuniarily. Understand then, once for all, that there is no power on earth that can force me to live with you

under such conditions. I consequently beseech you to let us part quietly and amicably.'"

"This refusal, painful as it must have been to you, monsieur, really had its origin in the noblest sentiments."

"I agree with you, madame, and the generosity Florence evinced, as well as the firmness of character and brave resignation which she displayed, only increased the love which I had always felt for her even when we differed most; so, in the hope that reflection and the fear of a life of poverty might yet restore her to me, I protested more energetically than ever against a separation, even promising that I would endeavour to mould my tastes by hers, but she replied: 'Such self-constraint as you propose to inflict upon yourself would transform you into a hypocrite. You have your own peculiar temperament; I have mine. All the resolutions and reasoning in the world will not change them any more than they would transform me into a brunette and you into a blond. The same incompatibility of temperament would still exist; besides, on no account will I consent to be an expense to you. If I loved you, it would be entirely different; so once more, and for the last time, I implore you to let us part as friends.' I refused."

"And yet you are separated you say?"

"The separation took place. Florence forced it upon me."

"In what way?"

"Oh, in the simplest way in the world, and one that suited her indolent nature perfectly. Would you believe it, madame? for three whole months she never addressed a single word to me, or answered a single question I put to her. For three whole months, in short, she never once looked at me, or evinced the slightest consciousness of my existence. It is impossible to give you any conception of what I suffered, — the anger, despair, and positive fury which her mute obstinacy caused me. Prayers, tears, bribes, threats, none of these could extort

so much as a word from her; one might as well have addressed them to a statue. Many a time, madame, it seemed to me that my brain would give way, and that I should go raving mad in the presence of this obdurate woman. My health became greatly impaired. A slow fever set in. This weakened my energy, and at last, convinced of the utter hopelessness of further resistance, I yielded."

"Good Heavens, how you must have suffered! But you were right. To struggle longer against such odds would have been useless."

"Consequently, I accepted the situation; but wishing to avoid scandal as much as possible, I consulted my lawyer. He informed me that one of the least objectionable grounds for a legal separation was an absolute refusal on the part of the wife to live with her husband; so Florence left my house and took up her abode in furnished apartments. I subsequently had the customary legal summons, demanding her return, served upon her. Her lawyer responded to it. The case was brought before the court, a decision was promptly rendered, and a legal separation was thus effected. My health had become so greatly impaired that my physicians thought a long journey my only chance of recovery. Before my departure, I gave one hundred thousand francs to my notary, charging him to compel my wife to accept the money. In case of refusal, he was to inform her that it would always be at her disposal; but this sum of money is still in his hands. I left France, hoping to find forgetfulness in travel. Far from it, I only realised, more deeply than ever, how much I missed my wife. I travelled through Egypt and Turkey, returning through the Illyrian provinces, and afterwards sailed from Venice for Cadiz, from which port I reëmbarked for Chili, where I met you, madame. After an extended tour through the West Indies, I sailed for Havre, where I landed only a few days ago. From inquiries concerning Florence,

instituted as soon as I reached Paris, I learned that she was living on the Rue de Vaugirard. And yesterday when we met, I had just been endeavouring to obtain more definite information in relation to her, through a person who lives in the same house."

"And did you succeed, monsieur?"

"She must be in very straitened circumstances financially, for she has only one room on the fourth floor, and keeps no servant. Besides, her conduct is irreproachable. I am told that she has never been known to receive a visitor, but from some strange whim, which seems doubly incomprehensible when I remember her former indolent habits and love of ease, she goes out every morning before four o'clock, and never returns until midnight."

"Exactly like Michel!" exclaimed Valentine, unable to conceal her surprise and growing uneasiness. "How strange!"

"What do you mean, madame?"

"Why, yesterday, I discovered that M. Michel Renaud lives on the fourth floor, in Number 57, and that, like Florence, he goes out at four o'clock every morning, and never returns before midnight."

"What can this mean?" exclaimed M. de Luceval. "Michel and my wife living on the same floor in adjoining houses, and going out and returning home at the same hour?"

"Does Florence know Michel?"

"M. Renaud is my cousin, and now I think of it, shortly after you left Paris, madame, he came and asked me to introduce him to my wife, upon whom he afterwards called a number of times. But now I think of it, you must know M. Michel Renaud very well yourself, as you feel sufficient interest in him to follow him."

"I will tell you all, monsieur," replied Valentine, blushing, "for I am as deeply interested in solving this mystery as you can possibly be."

"Ah, madame," exclaimed M. de Luceval, gloomily, "more than once, during my long absence, I experienced all the tortures of jealousy when I thought of Florence, free! Free! oh, no, in spite of our separation, the law gives me the right to avenge the wrong, if the woman who still bears my name is guilty, and this man — this man! Oh, if I were sure of his guilt, I would challenge him before another hour had passed, and either he or I —"

"Pray calm yourself, monsieur," said Madame d'Infreville, "strange as all this seems, there is really nothing that implicates Florence in the least. This morning she left home at the same hour Michel did, it is true; but though it was still dark, and the street was deserted, they did not exchange a single word, and held themselves sedulously aloof from each other."

"Still they leave home and return at the same hour! Where do they go? How do they spend all this time? They undoubtedly meet each other, but where?"

"We will solve this mystery. We must and shall. I am as anxious to do it as you can possibly be; and in order that you may understand the cause of this deep anxiety on my part, I will tell you as briefly as possible what my life has been since the day you saw me overwhelmed with shame under M. d'Infreville's just reproaches."

CHAPTER XIV.

VALENTINE'S STORY.

AFTER a brief silence, caused by her embarrassment and confusion, Madame d'Infreville, recovering her courage, said:

"When the falsehood, to which Florence's affection for me had made her a willing accomplice, was discovered in your presence, four years ago, my husband, on leaving your house, took me to his home. I found my mother there.

"'We shall leave Paris in an hour in company with your mother, madame,' M. d'Infreville said to me. 'I shall take you to one of my farms in Poitou, where you will live henceforth with your mother. If you refuse, I shall apply for a divorce, and make your disgrace public. I have abundant proof of it in the shape of two or three very significant letters which I found in your desk. If you give me the slightest trouble, I will prosecute you for adultery: I will drag you and your lover into the courts, and you shall be forced to drink the cup of degradation to the dregs. You will be sent to prison with the lowest of your sex, and your mother shall be turned into the street to starve. If you wish to escape all this, leave for Poitou without a word. It is not from any feeling of generosity or compassion that I make you this offer, but simply because I dislike the public scandal such a trial is sure to create, but if you refuse I will brave this scandal and ridicule. The infamy with which it will cover you will console me for that.'"

"I do not wonder that your husband felt very bitter resentment towards you," exclaimed M. de Luceval, "but such language was atrocious."

"I was compelled to listen to it, nevertheless, monsieur, and also to accept his terms. I was guilty, and I had an invalid mother, who was very poor. We started that same night for Poitou, where my husband left me. The farmhouse in which we lived — my mother and I — stood in the middle of a forest, beyond the boundaries of which we were never allowed to go. I spent eighteen months in this prison, without being permitted to write a single letter or hold the slightest communication with the outer world. At the end of that time death set me free, I was a widow. M. d'Infreville, justly incensed against me, had not left me a sou, and my mother and I became terribly poor. I could not earn enough to support my mother in any sort of comfort with my needle, and, after a long struggle with poverty, she, too, died."

Here Valentine's emotion overcame her, and she was obliged to pause for a moment; then, drying her tears, she continued:

"As soon as we returned to Paris, I made inquiries about Florence. I could learn nothing definite, but hearing that you had left on an extended journey through foreign lands, I thought it probable that your wife had accompanied you. A short time afterwards, when hope had almost deserted me, I had the good fortune to meet one of my old schoolmates, who offered me the position of governess in the family of her sister, whose husband had just been appointed consul at Valparaiso. It is needless to say that this offer was gladly accepted, and I sailed with the family the following week. It was while returning with them from a trip to the north of Chili that I met you, monsieur. Shortly after my return to Valparaiso, I received letters from Europe informing me that a distant relative of my father, an old lady I had

never even seen, had died and left me a modest fortune. I returned to France to claim it, and landed in Bordeaux only ten days ago. Now, monsieur, there is another confession I have to make, — one that is very embarrassing to me, but the frankness you have displayed makes it incumbent upon me."

And after a moment of painful embarrassment, Valentine, lowering her eyes, and blushing deeply, added:

"My companion in — in wrong doing — was — was your cousin, Michel Renaud."

"Some words that escaped you a short time ago led me to suspect as much, madame."

"I loved Michel, I loved him dearly, and this love has survived all the terrible trials I have undergone. The pleasant excitement of travel through an entirely new country served to divert my mind for a time from this foolish passion, and to alleviate my sufferings to some extent; but my affection for Michel is as profound now as it was four years ago, consequently you can realise how thoroughly I must understand and sympathise with your regret and chagrin, and how fully I must appreciate what you said yesterday about the inexplicable charm which characters that are diametrically opposed to our own exert over us."

"It is true, madame, that my somewhat limited acquaintance with my cousin, as well as everything I have ever heard about him, convinces me that he is one of the most indolent persons that ever lived. In fact, in the early days of my married life I used to try to make Florence ashamed of her indolence by holding Michel up to ridicule."

"I know them both well, monsieur, and it is impossible to conceive of two persons nearer alike."

"And it is this very fact that attracted them to each other, probably, though I saw nothing in my wife's conduct to excite the slightest suspicion. But they love

each other now, madame, they love each other, I am positive of it. My natural jealousy does not deceive me."

"Perhaps I ought to share your misgivings, monsieur, but I do not. I still doubt the justice of your suspicions, for if I believed that Michel had forgotten me, I certainly should not make any effort to see him again. But permit me to remind you, monsieur, that both Florence and Michel are free, perfectly free. Is she not legally divorced from you? What right have you to interfere with her actions?"

"The right of revenge."

"And what good will this revenge do you? If they love each other, persecution will only increase their love, without improving your chances in the least! No, no, you are too generous to wish to return evil for evil."

"But I have suffered so much, madame."

"I, too, have suffered, and perhaps even greater trials are in store for me; yet I would rather die than mar Michel's and Florence's happiness, if I knew for a certainty that they were happy."

"I cannot boast of an equal amount of resignation, madame. If I find that they love each other I will kill this man or he will kill me!"

"If I thought you capable of persisting in this resolve, I tell you frankly that I should immediately warn Florence and Michel of the danger that threatens them."

"You are wonderfully generous, madame!" retorted M. de Luceval, bitterly.

"And you, too, are generous, monsieur, when your resentment does not get the upper hand of you. Yes, you, too, are generous. I need no other proof than the touching solicitude which you manifested for Florence's welfare before your departure from France."

"That was a lamentable display of weakness on my part. Things are very different now."

"All I can say, monsieur, is that if you hope to find in me an accomplice in the perpetration of a futile and wicked act of vengeance, we will end this interview here and now. If, on the contrary, you are desirous of discovering the truth in order that you may know whether you have or have not any reason to hope, you can count upon me, for, by aiding each other, we are almost certain to discover the truth with very little delay."

"And if the truth should prove to be that they love each other —"

"Before we go any further, monsieur, give me your word as a man of honour that, however painful the discovery may prove to be, you will renounce all idea of vengeance and even of seeing Florence again."

"Never, madame, never!"

"So be it, monsieur," said Valentine, rising. "In that case we will proceed, henceforth, entirely independent of each other —"

"But, madame —"

"You are perfectly free, of course, to act as you see fit in the matter —"

"But pray, madame —"

"It is useless to say any more on the subject, monsieur."

CHAPTER XV.

TIDINGS FROM FLORENCE.

MONSIEUR DE LUCEVAL was silent for a moment. A fierce struggle between jealousy, his natural curiosity, and his fear that Madame d'Infreville might warn Florence as she had threatened, was going on in his breast. At last his better nature, aided a little perhaps by this last consideration, triumphed, and he replied:

"You have my promise, madame."

"Thank you, thank you, monsieur. A presentiment tells me that this good resolution will bring us happiness. Besides, reasoning entirely from what we now know —"

"Good Heavens, madame, I should be only too thankful to be able to hope!"

"And I think we have good reason to hope. In the first place, if Michel and Florence loved each other, — it is useless to mince words, — if they were lovers, there is nothing to prevent them from living as man and wife in some quiet country village, or even here in Paris, the place of all others in which one can live in seclusion, and according to one's liking."

"But these adjoining apartments, is it not more than likely that they communicate with each other?"

"But what possible object could there be in this secrecy, — these precautions so utterly foreign to Michel's and Florence's character?"

"Why, to prevent scandal, madame."

"But if they changed their names and declared them-

selves man and wife, how could there be any scandal? Who would discover the truth? Who would have any interest in ferreting it out?"

"Why, sooner or later, you or I, madame."

"All the more reason that they would have changed their names if they had felt that they had anything to fear, for so long as they kept their names, was it not comparatively easy to find out their whereabouts, as we have discovered for ourselves? Besides, monsieur, if they had wished to conceal themselves effectually, couldn't they have done it just as easily as they have managed to conceal the greater part of their existence, — for they spend most of the time away from home, you know."

"And it is that very thing that puzzles me so! Where do they spend this time? Where were they going this morning? Florence, who could seldom be induced to leave her bed by noon, has been getting up before four o'clock in the morning for four years. Think of it!"

"And Michel, too. It is certainly astonishing."

"To what can we attribute this change?"

"I do not know, but the change itself is a very favourable indication. It leads me to think that Michel has at last overcome the apathy and indolence which were so fatal to his welfare, and which have caused me so much suffering."

"You reason very sensibly, madame. If Florence is no longer the indolent creature who regarded a drive as entirely too fatiguing, and the slightest pleasure trip as positive martyrdom, if the life of privation which she has led for the last four years has transformed her, how gladly will I forget and ignore the past! How happy my life may still be! But, hold, madame, what I fear above all things now, is that I shall be such a fool as to hope at all."

"Why do you say that?"

"You have some reason to hope, madame; for you, at

least, have been loved, while Florence has never known a spark of love for me."

"Because there was such an utter lack of congeniality between her character and yours; but if, as we have good reason to believe, her character has been transformed by the very exigencies of the life she has been leading for the last four years, perhaps what she most disliked in you prior to that time will please her most now. Did she not tell you, in the heat of your quarrel, that she considered you one of the most generous and honourable of men?"

"Nevertheless, I dare not cherish the slightest hope, madame. Disappointment would be too hard to bear."

"Hope on, hope ever, monsieur! Disappointment, if it comes at all, will come only too soon. But to change hope into certainty, we must first penetrate the veil of mystery in which Florence and Michel have enveloped themselves. The nature of the relations existing between them once fathomed, we shall know exactly where we stand."

"I agree with you perfectly, madame, but how are we to do that?"

"By resorting to the same expedient we employed this morning; by following them, though not without exercising much greater precautions. The hour at which they leave home makes this comparatively easy, but if this mode of procedure proves a failure, we shall have to devise some other."

"Possibly it would be less likely to excite their suspicions if I followed them alone."

"Very well, monsieur, and if you do not succeed, I will see what I can do."

Here an apologetic rap at the door interrupted the conversation.

"Come in," said Madame d'Infreville.

A servant entered with a letter in his hand.

"A messenger just left this for madame," he explained.

"From whom?"

"He did not say, madame. He left as soon as he handed me the letter."

"You may go," said Valentine; then, turning to M. de Luceval, "Will you permit me?" she asked.

He bowed his assent. Valentine broke the seal, glanced at the signature, and exclaimed:

"Florence? Why, it is a letter from Florence!"

"From my wife?" exclaimed M. de Luceval.

They gazed at each other in utter amazement.

"But how did she discover your address, madame?"

"I have no idea."

"Read it, madame, read it, in Heaven's name!"

Madame d'Infreville read as follows:

"MY DEAR VALENTINE:—I have learned that you are in Paris, and I can not tell you what happiness it would give me to embrace you, but it is absolutely necessary for me to defer that pleasure for nearly three months, that is, until early in June.

"If you care to see your old friend at that time,—and I have the assurance to believe that you will,—you must go to M. Duval, notary, at Number 17 Rue Montmartre, and tell him who you are. He will then give you a letter containing my address. He will not receive this letter until the last of May, however; and at this present time he does not even know me by name.

"I am so certain of your affection, my dear Valentine, that I shall count upon a visit from you. The journey may seem a little long to you, but you can remain with me and rest, and we shall have so much to say to each other.

"Your best friend, who loves you with all her heart,

"FLORENCE DE L."

The intense surprise this letter excited can be readily understood. Valentine and her companion remained

silent for a moment. M. de Luceval was the first to speak.

"They must have seen us following them this morning," he exclaimed.

"But how did Florence discover where I am?" said Valentine, thoughtfully. "I have met nobody I know in Paris except you, monsieur, and one of our old servants, with whose assistance I succeeded in ascertaining Michel's address. The man of whom I speak has a sister who was Michel's nurse and afterwards his housekeeper."

"But why did Florence write to you, madame, and not to me, if she suspected that I was following her?"

"You are mistaken in that supposition, perhaps, monsieur. She may have written to me without knowing that you are in Paris."

"But in that case, why does she postpone your visit to her, and why this indirect request that you make no attempt to discover her whereabouts before the last of May, as she warns you that the person who is to give you her address will not know it himself until that time."

"Yes, it is very evident that Florence does not wish to see me until after three months have elapsed, and that she has taken measures accordingly. Do you suppose that Michel can have had any hand in the sending of this letter?"

"It is my opinion that we haven't a minute to lose," said M. de Luceval. "Let us take a cab and go to the Rue de Vaugirard at once. If my wife's suspicions have been aroused, it is more than likely that she returned home during the day and gave some order that may enlighten us."

"You are right, monsieur; let us go at once."

An hour afterwards Valentine and M. de Luceval rejoined each other in the cab which had deposited them

a short distance from the two adjoining houses where their search was to be conducted.

"Ah, well, monsieur, what news?" asked Madame d'Infreville, who, pale and agitated, had been the first to return to the vehicle.

"There can no longer be any doubt that my wife suspects the truth, madame. I told the porter that I wished to see Madame de Luceval on very important business. 'That lady no longer resides here, monsieur,' the man replied. 'She came in a carriage about eleven o'clock and took away several bundles and packages, at the same time informing me that she had no intention of returning again. Madame de Luceval has paid her rent six months in advance ever since she came here, and some time ago she gave notice of her intention to leave on the first of June. As for the few articles of furniture that she owns, she is to let us know what disposal we are to make of them.' It was impossible to get anything more out of the man. And you, madame, what did you find out?"

"Almost the very same thing that you did, monsieur," replied Valentine, despondently. "Michel returned home about eleven o'clock. He, too, informed the porter of his intention of leaving the house, and promised to let him know what disposition to make of his furniture. He, too, had notified the landlord of his intention of giving up his rooms on the first of June."

"Then it is on the first of June that they are to be united?"

"But in that case why do they make an appointment with me for the same date?"

"Whatever they may say, and whatever they may do, I am determined to solve this mystery!" exclaimed M. de Luceval.

Madame d'Infreville's only response was a melancholy shake of the head.

CHAPTER XVI.

AN IDLER'S PARADISE.

It was about three months after M. de Luceval and Madame d'Infreville met in Paris, when the events we are about to relate occurred at a modest villa near the town of Hyères, in Provence.

This villa, which was decidedly bright and cheerful rather than pretentious in appearance, stood at the foot of a small hill, not more than five hundred yards from the sea. The small garden, half an acre, at the most, in extent, and shaded with tall maples and sycamores, was traversed by a rapid stream that had its source in a neighbouring mountain, and that flowed into the sea, after diffusing a refreshing moisture and coolness through the garden. The villa itself, which was a pretty white house with green shutters, was embowered in a thick grove of immense orange-trees, now in full bloom, which protected it from the scorching rays of the sun. A hawthorn hedge enclosed the garden, which was entered through a small gate set in posts of rough masonry.

About three o'clock in the afternoon, while the sun was shining with a splendour rivalling that of Italy, a travelling carriage, coming from the direction of Hyères, stopped upon the brow of the hill overlooking the little country-seat, and M. de Luceval, his face pale, and his features drawn with anxiety, got out of the vehicle, and assisted Madame d'Infreville to alight. That lady, after having paused for an instant to look around her, caught

sight of the little villa half hidden in the grove of orange-trees, and, pointing to it, exclaimed, in a voice that trembled with emotion:

"That is the house, M. de Luceval."

"Yes, judging from the directions given us, this must be the place. The momentous hour has come. Go, madame. I will wait for you here, though I do not know but it requires more courage to remain here in this agony of suspense than it does to accompany you."

"Still, remember your promise, I entreat you, monsieur. Let me accomplish this painful mission alone. You might not be able to control yourself, and, in spite of the solemn pledge you have given me, you might — But I can not finish. The mere thought of such a thing makes me shudder."

"Do not be alarmed, madame, I shall keep my word, unless — unless — "

"But, monsieur, you have sworn — "

"I shall not forget my oath, madame."

"Let us hope for the best, monsieur. The day for which we have been waiting with so much anxiety for three months has come at last. In an hour the mystery will be solved. We shall know all, and our fate will be decided."

"Yes, yes, our fate will be decided," responded M. de Luceval, gloomily.

"And now *au revoir*. Perhaps I shall not return alone."

But M. de Luceval shook his head gloomily, as Valentine, with a gesture of encouragement, started down a narrow footpath that led straight to the garden gate of the villa.

M. de Luceval, left alone, paced restlessly to and fro, turning every now and then, in spite of himself, to gaze at the pretty dwelling below. Suddenly he paused, his face turned livid, and his eyes gleamed like coals of fire.

He had just seen, a little way from the hedge that surrounded the garden, a man clad in a white duck suit, and wearing a big straw hat. In another moment, this man had disappeared among the rocks that bordered the shore.

Running to the carriage, M. de Luceval drew out from under the seat, where he had concealed it from Madame d'Infreville's eyes, a box containing a pair of duelling pistols, and with this box in his hand started in pursuit of the man.

But before he had gone ten yards M. de Luceval paused, reflected a moment, then slowly returned to the carriage, and replaced the box, saying to himself:

"There will be time enough for that by and by. I will keep my oath unless rage and despair should carry me beyond all the bounds of reason and honour."

Then, with his eyes riveted upon the house, M. de Luceval, too, descended the path.

In the meantime, Valentine had reached the gate of the enclosure, and knocked.

A moment afterwards the gate opened, and a woman about fifty years of age, neatly dressed in the Provençal fashion, appeared.

On seeing her, Valentine could not conceal her astonishment.

"What, Madame Reine, you here!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, madame," replied the woman, with a strong Southern accent, and apparently not at all surprised at Valentine's visit. "Will you be good enough to come in?"

Valentine, seeming to repress a question that had risen to her lips, blushed slightly, and stepped inside. The old woman (Madame Reine had been Michel Renaud's nurse, and his only servant, even in his palmy day) closed the gate, and conducted Madame d'Infreville into the dense shade formed by the quincunx of orange-trees, in the centre of which the little white villa stood.

"Is Madame de Luceval here?" inquired Valentine, in a slightly husky voice.

The old nurse paused suddenly, placed her finger on her lip, as if recommending silence on the part of Madame d'Infreville, then motioned her to look a little to the left, in front of her.

Valentine stood as if petrified.

She saw before her two bright-coloured hammocks fastened to the gnarled trunks of some orange-trees. One of the hammocks was empty. Florence was lying in the other. A blue and white striped canopy, suspended over the hammock, swelled like a sail in the fresh sea-breeze and imparted a gentle swinging motion to this airy couch.

Florence, clad in a thin white gown that left her throat and arms bare, was slumbering in an attitude of graceful *abandon*, her pretty head resting upon one dimpled arm, while the gentle breeze toyed caressingly with the soft ringlets that shaded her white brow. Her left arm was hanging out of the hammock, and in the same hand was a big green fan which she had evidently been using when sleep overtook her.

Never had Valentine seen Florence look so beautiful and fresh and young. Her scarlet lips were half parted, her breathing was as gentle and regular as that of an infant, and her features, in their perfect repose, wore an expression of ineffable contentment and happiness.

In the clear waters of the little stream that flowed through the little lawn stood a big basket filled with watermelons, purple figs, and early grapes cooling in the icy flood, in which two carafes, one filled with lemonade of a pale amber hue, the other with ruby-tinted pomegranate juice, were also submerged. Upon the soft grass, near the edge of the stream, and in the shade, were two big armchairs, several straw mats, a number of cushions, and sundry other aids to comfort and *dolce far niente;* and lastly, within easy reach of

"Florence was slumbering in graceful abandon."

Original etching by Adrian Marcel.

the armchairs, stood a table upon which a number of books and papers, a Turkish pipe, a number of glasses, and a plate of the small wheaten cakes peculiar to that province were heaped in picturesque confusion. To complete the picture, one could discern through two vistas in the quincunx, on one side, the still, blue waters of the Mediterranean; on the other, the summits of the distant mountains, whose majestic outlines stood out in bold relief against the azure sky.

Valentine, charmed by the scene before her, stood as if spellbound.

A moment more, and Florence's little hand opened slowly. The fan dropped, and, in escaping from the fingers of the sleeper, woke her.

CHAPTER XVII.

IN CHANGE, UNCHANGED.

On seeing Madame d'Infreville, Florence uttered a cry of joy, and, springing from the hammock, threw her arms around her friend's neck.

"Ah," she exclaimed, kissing Valentine tenderly, her eyes filling with tears, "I was sure that you would come. I have been expecting you for two days, and you know the proverb, 'Happiness comes while one sleeps,'" she added, smiling and casting a glance at the hammock which she had just quitted, "the proverb of the slothful, but a true one, nevertheless, as you see. But let me take a good look at you," she continued, still holding her friend's hands, but drawing back a step or two. "As beautiful, yes, even more beautiful than ever, I see! Kiss me again, my dear Valentine. Think of it, four years have passed since we last saw each other, and what a terrible day that was! But each thing in its own proper time! And first," added Florence, taking her friend by the hand and leading her to the brookside, "as the heat is so overpowering, here are some of the fruits of my garden which I have been cooling for you."

"Thanks, Florence, but I would rather not eat anything now. But now, let me, in my turn, take a good look at you, and tell you — I am no flatterer, though, as you know — how much prettier you have grown. What a colour you have! and how young and, above all, how happy you look!"

"Do you really think so? So much the better, for I should be ungrateful, indeed, if I did not look happy. But I understand your impatience. You want to talk, and so do I — in fact, I am just dying to! So let us talk, but first sit down — here, in this armchair. Now put this ottoman under your feet, and take this cushion to lean against. One can not make oneself too comfortable, you know."

"You seem to me to have made great progress in your search for comfort, Florence," remarked Valentine, with a constrained smile, more and more surprised at her friend's careless air, though their interview, by reason of existing circumstances, was really of such a grave nature.

"I have, my dear Valentine. Do you see that little strap attached to the back of the chair?"

"I see it, but have no idea what it is for."

"It is to support the head if one wishes."

And adding example to precept, this nonchalant young woman added:

"Don't you see how comfortable it is? But what is the matter? You are gazing at me with such a surprised, almost chagrined air," said the young woman, suddenly becoming serious. "Well, you are right. You think me indifferent to all your past, and I trust now partially forgotten, trials," added Florence, in a tone of deep feeling. "Far from it! I have sympathised with you in every grief, but this is such a happy, blissful day to me that I do not want to mar it by any unpleasant recollections."

"What, you know — "

"Yes, I have known for more than a year of your imprisonment at Poitou, your subsequent widowhood and poverty, from which you suffered more on your mother's account than on your own. I know, too, how courageously you struggled against adversity. But dear me! this is exactly what I was afraid of!" half sobbed,

half laughed the young woman, dashing the tears from her eyes. "And to-day of all days in the world!"

"Florence, my dear friend, I never once doubted your sincere affection."

"Is that really true?"

"It is, indeed. But how did you learn all these particulars in regard to me?"

"Oh, some from this person, some from that! I have been leading such a busy, active life it has brought me in contact with all sorts of people."

"You?"

"Yes, I," responded Florence, with a joyous, almost triumphant air.

"Tell me all about yourself. I know nothing about your life for the past four years, or at least since your separation from M. de Luceval."

"True, M. de Luceval must have told you all about that, and about the strange way in which I managed to make my husband abandon the idea of forcing me to travel against my will, and insisting upon my remaining his wife whether or no."

"And especially how you insisted upon a separation after you learned of your financial ruin. Yes, M. de Luceval told me all about that. He does full justice to your delicacy of feeling."

"The real generosity was on his part. Poor Alexandre! but for his unceasing peregrinations and his Wandering Jew temperament he would be a very nice sort of a man, eh, Valentine?" added Florence, with a mischievous smile. "How fortunate that you met him and that you have seen so much of him during the past three months. You must have learned to appreciate him as he deserves."

"What do you mean?" asked Valentine, looking at her friend with astonishment, and colouring slightly. "Really, Florence, you must be mad."

"I am mad — with happiness. But come, Valentine,

let us be as frank with each other now as we have always been in the past. There is a name that you have been impatient and yet afraid to utter ever since your arrival. It is Michel's name."

"You are right, Florence."

"Well, Valentine, to set your mind at rest, once for all, I beg leave to inform you that Michel is not, and never has been, my lover."

A gleam of hope shone in Valentine's eyes, but an instant afterwards she exclaimed, incredulously:

"But, Florence —"

"You know me. I have never lied to any one in my life. Why should I deceive you? Is not Michel free? Am I not free, also? I repeat that he is not, and that he never has been, my lover. I do not know what may happen in the future, but I am telling you the truth about the present as well as the past. Is it possible, Valentine, that you, who are delicacy itself, do not understand that if I was, or if I had been, Michel's mistress, nothing could be more painful and embarrassing to both you and me than this interview, to which I, at least, have looked forward with such delight?"

"Ah, now I can breathe freely again!" cried Valentine, springing up and embracing her friend effusively. "In spite of the joy I felt at seeing you again, I was conscious of such a dreadful feeling of constraint. I am relieved of a terrible anxiety now."

"A just punishment for having doubted me, my dear. But you ask me to be frank, so I will add that, though Michel and I are not lovers, we adore each other, as much, at least, as two such indolent creatures as ourselves can adore any one."

"So Michel loves me no longer," said Madame d'Infreville, looking searchingly at Florence. "He has forgotten me entirely, then?"

"I think the best way to answer that question is to tell you our story, and —"

"Good Heavens! what was that?" exclaimed Valentine, interrupting her friend.

"What do you mean?" asked Florence, turning her head in the direction in which her friend was looking. "What did you hear?"

"Listen."

The two friends listened breathlessly for several seconds, but the profound stillness was broken by no sound.

"I must have been mistaken, but I thought I heard a crackling sound in the shrubbery."

"It was the wind swaying the branches of that old cedar you see over there. Did you never notice what a peculiar sound evergreens make when the wind blows?" responded Florence, carelessly. Then she added: "And now I have explained this strange phenomenon, Valentine, listen to Michel's story and mine."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE STRONGEST OF INCENTIVES.

MADAME D'INFREVILLE, recovering from the alarm she had felt for a moment, again turned to her friend, and said:

"Go on, Florence, I need not tell you with what curiosity, or rather with what intense interest, I am waiting."

"Ah, well then, my dear Valentine, one thing my husband cannot have told you, as he was not aware of the fact, is that I received a letter from Michel two days after your departure."

"And the object of this letter?"

"Knowing that you intended asking me to write a note to you conveying the impression that we had been spending a good deal of time together, Michel, hearing nothing from you, naturally became very uneasy, and, discovering you had left Paris in company with your mother, was anxious to ascertain where you had gone."

"Indeed. So my disappearance really disturbed him to that extent?" said Valentine, with mingled bitterness and incredulity.

"Yes, it did, and thinking I might be able to give him some information on the subject, he wrote asking permission to call on me, which, as he was my husband's cousin, seemed so natural that I consented."

"But your husband?"

"Oh, he, being ignorant that Michel was the object of the passion which had been your ruin, made no objection."

"Yes; M. de Luceval was not aware of that fact until I told him."

"So Michel called, and I told him of the distressing scene that I had witnessed. His grief touched me, and we both resolved to make every possible effort to find you; a resolution which, on his part, at least, showed no little courage, for you can understand what all this prospective trouble and effort meant to a nature like his; nevertheless —"

"Well?"

"Nevertheless, he exclaimed, naïvely: 'Ah, whether I find her or not, this is the last love affair I ever intend to have!' A feeling which corresponded exactly with that which I once expressed to you in relation to the misery of having a lover, so I must say that I considered this resolve a mark of good sense on his part, though I encouraged him in his determination to find you if possible."

"And did he really make any efforts in that direction?"

"He did, with an energy that amazed me. He kept me fully advised of his progress, but, unfortunately, the precautions your husband had taken rendered all our efforts unavailing; besides, neither of us received any letter or message from you."

"Alas! Florence, no prisoner on a desert island was ever more completely isolated than I. Surrounded by M. d'Infreville's devoted henchmen, the sending of any letter was an impossibility."

"Well, at last we were compelled to abandon all hope of finding you."

"But while you two were thus occupied, you saw Michel quite often, doubtless."

"Necessarily."

"And what did you think of him?"

"If I said all the nice things I think of him, I should feel that I was sounding my own praises very loudly, for

every day I became more and more amazed at the marvellous resemblance which existed between his character, ideas, and tastes and my own. Still, as I was never particularly modest so far as my own virtues and attractions are concerned, I frankly admit that I thought we were both charming."

"It was about this time that you became so firmly resolved to separate from your husband, was it not?"

"Fie, fie!" exclaimed Florence, shaking her finger at her friend. "No, madame, the real cause of such a determination on my part was something entirely different. Michel and I were both so faithful to our true characters, that in speaking of you, and consequently in speaking of all the tumults and commotions and worries and agitation which such liaisons always cause, we always said to each other in perfect good faith:

"'This is what love leads to, you see, monsieur. One knows no peace, but lives ever on the *qui vive*, with one eye and ear to the keyhole, so to speak.'

"'And there are bothersome duels with all their attendant scandals, madame.'

"'And all the tortures of jealousy, monsieur, and drives in rickety cabs in which one is jostled about until one's bones positively ache.'

"'Yes, all this trouble and fatigue, and for what, madame?'

"'You are right, monsieur. I, too, ask for what?'

"In short, if any one could have listened to our moral reflections on this subject, he would have been vastly amused. At last came the time when M. de Luceval attempted to force me to travel against my will, but he finally abandoned that idea."

"Yes, he told me the means you adopted to circumvent him. They were peculiar, but certainly very efficacious."

"What I most desired at that time was repose, both mental and physical, for though my husband had acted

very brutally towards me in that scene about your letter, my poor Valentine, — so brutally, in fact, that I had threatened to leave him, — I changed my mind after reflecting on the subject, for I couldn't bear the idea of living alone, that is to say, of having to attend to the thousand and one things my husband or my agent had always attended to for me; so I confined my demands to the following: I was never to be asked to travel, though I intended to encourage my husband to do so as often as possible, so I wouldn't be continually worried by his restlessness."

"And so you could see Michel whenever you pleased, I suppose."

"Of course, and without the slightest bother or secrecy, — without any concealment, in short, for there was really nothing in our relations to conceal."

"But your determination to separate from your husband, at least so he told me, was ostensibly due to your loss of fortune. Was that the real cause?"

"Yes. You see, Valentine, I could not bear the idea of being henceforth in my husband's power, — of accepting wages from him, so to speak! No; I remembered too well the humiliation you, a penniless girl, had suffered from having married a rich man, and the mere thought of such a life was revolting alike to my delicacy and my natural indolence."

"Your indolence? What on earth do you mean, Florence? Did not a separation from your husband necessitate the renunciation of the wealth and luxury that would permit you to lead a life of ease?"

"But you forget, Valentine, that if I accepted M. de Luceval's wages, — if I remained in his employ, in other words, — I would be obliged to sacrifice my tastes to his, to plunge into the feverish maelstrom of society, in which he delighted, — to go to the Caucasus with him, in short, if the whim seized him, and I preferred death to a life like that."

"But your husband loved you so, why did you not endeavour to make him sacrifice his wishes and tastes to yours?"

"He loved me, oh, yes, he loved me as I love strawberries, — to eat them. Besides, I knew him too well; he could no more change his character than I could change mine, and our life would have become a hell. It was much better for us to part at once."

"Did you inform Michel of your determination?"

"Yes, and he approved unreservedly. It was about this time that we first formed some vague plans for the future, — plans which were always subordinate to you, however."

"To me?"

"Yes, certainly. Michel knew his duty, and would have done it, if we had succeeded in finding you. While he was making a final attempt in that direction, I, on my side, was endeavouring to secure the separation I desired. At the end of four months I was legally divorced from M. de Luceval, and he started on his travels. Then, and not until then, did I see Michel again, as I had requested him to cease his visits until I was free. Neither of us had anything from you, so, being forced to renounce all hope of seeing you again, we began to consider our plans for the future. I alluded a short time ago, my dear Valentine, to the prodigies indolence can achieve; I will tell you some of them.

"The point of departure that we took, or, rather, our declaration of principles was this," said Florence, with the most solemn but comical air imaginable: "'We have but one desire and object in life, — perfect rest and peace of mind and body, — all mental and physical effort being positively restricted to dreaming, reading, talking, and gazing at the heavens, the trees, the streams, the fields and mountains that God has made; to keeping cool in summer, and warm in winter. We are too devoutly idle to be ambitious, vain, or avaricious, to desire the

burden of sumptuous living or the fatigue and excitement of a gay social life. The requisites for the life of indolence of which we dream are a small house that is warm in winter and cool in summer, a nice garden, and a few comfortable armchairs, hammocks, and couches, several pleasing views within our range of vision so we shall not be obliged to take the trouble to go in search of them, an equable climate, frugal fare, — neither of us are gourmands, — and a servant. It is also essential that the means to lead such a life may be assured beyond the shadow of a doubt, so we may never be troubled by any anxiety in regard to pecuniary matters.' How were these ambitions to be realised? Prodigies of courage and industry must be performed to bring about this much desired consummation. Listen and admire, my dear Valentine."

"I am listening, Florence, and I am beginning to admire, too, for it seems to me I divine everything now."

"Oh, do not do that, I beg of you; let me have the pleasure of surprising you. Well, to resume my story, Michel's old nurse was a Provençale, a native of Hyères. She often spoke of the beauty of her native province, where one could live upon almost nothing, as she declared, often asserting that ten or twelve thousand francs would purchase a pretty little cottage on the coast, with a fine orange grove. One of Michel's friends had just gone to Hyères for his health; we asked him to make some inquiries, and he confirmed all Michel's nurse had said. He even told us of such a property a few miles from Hyères, which could be purchased for eleven thousand francs; but it was leased for three years, and the purchaser could not obtain possession until the expiration of that time. Having great confidence in this friend's judgment, we begged him to purchase the property, but now a serious difficulty presented itself. To purchase the house, and also an annuity of two thousand francs a

year, an amount that would prove sufficient for our wants, we would need about sixty thousand francs."

"But how could you hope to obtain so large an amount?"

"Why, by working for it, my dear," said Florence with a valiant air, "working like lions!"

"You, Florence, you work?" exclaimed Valentine, in astonishment. "And Michel, too?"

"And Michel, too, my dear Valentine. Yes, we have worked night and day at all sorts of avocations for several years. I had six thousand francs left out of the ten thousand I had asked for when I married. A friend of Michel's undertook to straighten out his affairs, and managed to save fifteen thousand francs out of the wreck. Both amounts were carefully invested, as we were resolved not to touch a penny of either principal or interest, so we might gain the forty thousand francs needed to secure our paradise the sooner."

"To think that you and Michel should be capable of anything like this!"

"What, it surprises you?"

"Of course it does."

"But you must remember how terribly indolent Michel and I are!"

"That is the very reason it astonishes me so much."

"But that is the very reason it should not."

"Should not?"

"Certainly. Think what a powerful incentive, what a sharp spur, our indolence was!"

"Your indolence?"

"Yes; think what courage and energy and ardour it must excite in your breast, when you say to yourself at the close of each day, however harassed one may have been, and whatever privations one may have had to endure: 'I am one step nearer liberty, independence, rest, and the bliss of doing nothing.' Yes, Valentine,

yes; and the more fatigued one feels, the more eagerly he looks forward to the ineffable happiness he hopes to enjoy some day. We are told, you know, that celestial happiness must be gained by trials and tribulations here below. The same rule holds good in this case, only, — strictly *entre nous* of course, — I would rather enjoy my little paradise here on earth than wait for the other."

Madame d'Infreville was so astonished at what she had heard, and she gazed at her friend with such a bewildered air, that Florence, wishing to give her time to recover from her surprise, paused for a moment.

CHAPTER XIX.

PAST STRUGGLES.

Recovering from her amazement at last, Madame d'Infreville said:

"Really, Florence, I hardly know whether I am awake or dreaming. Once more, I ask, is it possible that a person as indolent and fond of ease as you have always been could evince such wonderful courage and energy?"

"Ah, I shall be obliged to go into particulars, I see. Have you any idea of the kind of life we have led for the last four years, — Michel and I, I mean?"

"I was told that you both went out every morning before light, and did not return until late at night."

"Oh, dear!" cried Florence, with a merry laugh, "when I remember all these things now, how amusing they seem, but there wasn't much fun in them then, I assure you. I'll give you the order of exercises of one of the last days of my purgatory, as I call it. You can form a pretty correct idea of the others from that. I got up at three o'clock in the morning, and devoted an hour either to copying music or colouring some large lithograph. You ought not to be very much surprised at this last exhibition of talent on my part, for you know that, at the convent, colouring engravings of the saints and copying music were almost the only things I did at all creditably."

"Yes, and it was very clever in you to think of putting these accomplishments to some practical use."

"I think so myself, particularly as I often made, in that way, four or five francs a day, or rather a night, over and above my other earnings."

"Your other earnings, and what were they, pray?"

"Well, to resume the account of my day: At four o'clock, I started for the market."

"Great Heavens! for the market? You? And what took you there, pray?"

"I tended the stall of a dairywoman, who was too fine a lady to get up so early. Can you imagine anything more pastoral than a traffic in cream and butter and eggs? I received a small commission on my sales, in addition to my regular salary, so every year I derived an income of two hundred francs, more or less, from this source."

"You, Florence, the Marquise de Luceval, in such a rôle?"

"But how about Michel?"

"Michel? What did he do?"

"Oh, he had all sorts of avocations, one of them being the office of inspector of goods at the market. In return for his services, he received a salary of fifteen hundred francs, and the profound respect and consideration of all the market women and hucksters. His duties were over at nine o'clock, after which he went to his office, and I to my store."

"Your store?"

"Yes, on the Rue de l'Arbre-Sec, at the sign of the Corbeille d'Or, I was forewoman in that large and well-known lingerie establishment, and as I can, with reason, boast of both taste and skill in such matters, and haven't a peer in the confection of dressing sacks, bathing suits, peignoirs, etc., I demanded a good price for my services, — it is never well to undervalue oneself, — fifteen hundred francs a year, and found, — 'you can take me or not, as you please, at that figure.' It was also understood that I was never to enter the salesroom. I was

afraid, you see, of being recognised by some customer, and that might have prevented me from securing employment for the rest of the day."

"What! wasn't your day's work ended when you left the store?"

"Ended at eight o'clock in the evening! What are you thinking of? — for I had stipulated that I was to be free at eight o'clock so I could utilise the rest of the time. For a year I worked at home in the evening, on tapestry work or on my water-colours, or copying music, but after that a friend of Michel's recommended me to a very aristocratic, but rather misanthropical, blind lady, who, being unable to go into society, preferred to pass her evenings in listening to reading; so, for three years, I acted as reader for her at a salary of eight hundred francs a year. I went to her house at nine o'clock, I read to her awhile, and then we talked and drank tea by turn. This lady lived on the Rue de Tournon, so Michel could call for me about midnight, on his return from his theatre."

"From his theatre?"

"Yes, from the Odéon."

"Good Heavens! has he turned actor?"

"You are mad!" cried Florence, laughing heartily. "Nothing of the sort. I told you that we both did anything we could find to do, and Michel was controller at the Odéon, performing his duties there after he had left his desk, where he earned two thousand four hundred francs a year as an entry clerk."

"Michel, who was so indolent that he would not pay the slightest attention to his own business affairs, in years gone by!"

"And take notice that, after he returned home at night, he used to post books and straighten up people's accounts, thus adding considerably to his earnings in the course of a year. In this fashion, my dear Valentine, and by living with the most rigid economy, going

without a fire in winter, waiting on ourselves, and even working on Sunday, we accumulated the amount we needed in four years. Well, was I wrong when I boasted of the wonders indolence could accomplish?"

"I can't get over my astonishment. This seems incredible."

"Ah, but Valentine, as Michel says, 'A love of idleness is often the real cause of some of the most laborious lives. Why do so many persons, who are neither ambitious nor avaricious, toil with such untiring ardour? In order that they may cease work as soon as possible, is it not?'"

"You are right, perhaps. At least, I see now that the love of idleness may impart wonderful energy to one's efforts, at least for a time. But tell me, Florence, why were your rooms and Michel's so close together and yet separated?"

"Oh, that arrangement was convincing proof of the most sublime and heroic wisdom on our part!" exclaimed Florence, triumphantly. We said to ourselves, 'What is our object? To accumulate as quickly as possible the amount of money needed to enable us to lead an idle life. That being the case, time is money, so the less time we waste the more money we shall earn, and the surest way of losing a great deal of time is for us to be together. Nor is this all. We used, it is true, to hold in holy horror all love that caused one trouble and pain; but now that we are free, and there would be no cause for anxiety or self-reproach in our love, who knows,—the devil is very cunning, and we might succumb. Then what would become of our good resolutions, and all the work we are planning to do? All that time, that is to say all that money, lost! For how could we hope to muster up the necessary courage to tear ourselves from indolence, and from love as well? No, no, we must be inexorable towards ourselves, so as not to imperil our future, and swear, in the name of

Indolence, our divinity, not to speak a word, a single word, to each other until our little fortune has been made.'"

"What, during these four years —"

"We have kept our oath."

"Not one word?"

"Not one word from the day we began to work."

"Florence, you must be exaggerating. Such self-restraint is an impossibility."

"I promised to tell you the truth, and I am telling it. We have never spoken a word to each other during these four years. When any important matter or any question affecting our interests was to be decided, we wrote to each other; that is all. I must also admit that we invented a way to communicate with each other through the wall between our rooms. It was a very brief telegraphic code, however. Only extensive enough to permit us to say to each other, 'Good night, Michel' — 'Good night, Florence;' and in the morning, 'Good morning, Michel' — 'Good morning, Florence;' or, 'It is time to start,' or now and then: 'Courage, Michel' — 'Courage, Florence; let us think of paradise, and endure purgatory as cheerfully as possible!' But even this mode of correspondence had to be strictly tabooed now and then; for would you believe it? Michel sometimes wasted so much time in tapping upon the wall with the handle of his pocket-knife that I was obliged to silence the hot-headed creature in the most peremptory manner."

"And did this meagre correspondence satisfy you?"

"Perfectly. Did we not have a life in common, in spite of the wall that separated us? Were not our minds concentrated upon the same aim, and was not our pursuance of this aim exactly the same thing as always thinking of each other? Besides, we saw each other every morning and evening. As we were not lovers, that sufficed. If we had been, a single look

might have been enough to destroy all our good resolutions. Well, a fortnight ago, our object was accomplished. In four years we had accumulated forty-two thousand eight hundred francs! We might have 'retired,' as merchants say, several months earlier; but we said, or, rather, we wrote to each other, 'It is not well for persons to crave any more than is required to provide them with the necessaries of life; still, we ought to have enough to supply the needs of any poor and hungry stranger who may knock at our door. Nothing gives greater peace to the soul than the consciousness of having always been kind and humane.' This being the case, we prolonged our purgatory a little. And now, Valentine, confess that there is nothing like well-directed indolence to imbue persons with energy, courage, and virtue."

"Farewell, Florence," said Madame d'Infreville, in a voice husky with tears, and throwing herself in her friend's arms, "farewell for ever!"

"What do you mean, Valentine?"

"A vague hope impelled me to come here, — a foolish, senseless hope. Once more, farewell! Be happy with Michel. Heaven created you for each other, and your happiness has been nobly earned."

The garden gate closed noisily.

"Madame, madame," cried the old nurse, hastening towards them with an unsealed letter, which she handed to Valentine, "the gentleman that remained in the carriage told me to give this to you at once. He came from over there," added the old woman, pointing to the same clump of shrubbery in which Valentine had fancied that she heard a suspicious sound, some time before.

Florence watched her friend with great surprise, as Valentine opened the missive, which contained another note, and read the following words, hastily scrawled in pencil:

"Give the enclosed to Florence, and rejoin me immediately. There is no hope. Let us depart at once."

Involuntarily Madame d'Infreville turned as if to comply with the request.

"Where are you going, Valentine?" cried Florence, hastily seizing her friend by the hand.

"Wait for me a moment," replied Madame d'Infreville, pressing her friend's hands convulsively, "wait for me, and read this."

Then giving the note to Florence, she darted away, while her friend, more and more astonished as she perceived that the writing was her husband's, read these lines:

"Concealed behind a clump of shrubbery, I have heard all. A vague hope brought me here, and I confess that, when I saw this hope blighted, my first thought was of revenge. But I renounce both the hope and the revenge. Be happy, Florence! I can feel for you henceforth only esteem and respect.

"My only regret is that I am unable to give you your entire liberty. The law prevents that, so you must resign yourself to bearing my name.

"Once more farewell, Florence; you will never see me again, but, from this day on, remember me as your most sincere and devoted friend, A. DE LUCEVAL."

Madame de Luceval was deeply touched by this letter, which she had scarcely finished when she heard the sound of carriage wheels becoming fainter and fainter in the distance.

Florence felt that Valentine would never return, and when, just before nightfall, Michel came in search of Madame de Luceval, she handed him her husband's letter.

Michel, like Florence, was deeply touched by this letter, but after a little he remarked, with a smile:

"Fortunately, Valentine is free."

CHAPTER XX.

CONCLUSION.

ABOUT two years after these events, the following paragraphs appeared in a number of the journals of the times:

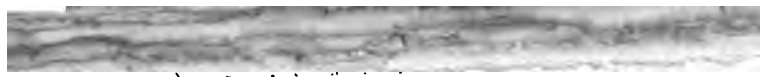
"A correspondent, writing from Symarkellil, says that the ascent of one of the highest peaks of the Caucasus was made late in May by two intrepid French tourists, M. and Madame M——. The latter, a tall and remarkably handsome brunette, donned male attire and shared all the dangers of this dangerous expedition. The guides could not say enough in praise of her courage, coolness, and gaiety. It is said that these two untiring travellers afterwards started across the steppes to Saint Petersburg in order to reach there in time to join Captain Moradoff's expedition to the North Pole. The numerous letters from influential persons which they took with them to the court of Russia lead them to hope that they will obtain the favour they ask, and that they will be allowed to take part in this perilous expedition to the polar seas."

"A correspondent, writing from Hyères under date of December 29th, says:

"A singular instance of extraordinary vegetation lately presented itself in this neighbourhood. Rumours of an orange-tree in full bloom at this season of the year were current, and as we seemed to doubt these reports, a friend,

to convince us, took us to a small country-seat on the coast a few miles from here. There, in a quincunx of orange-trees, we saw, with our own eyes, a superb tree literally covered with buds and blossoms which perfumed the air for hundreds of yards around. We were more than repaid for the trouble of our journey by the sight of this freak of nature, and the cordial welcome given us by the master and mistress of the house, — M. and Madame Michel."

THE END.



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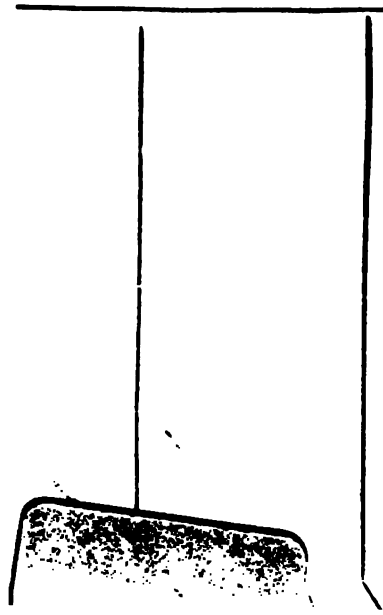
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